

Vaudeville Follies  
The Theatre Awards  
Adult Puppets

Australia's magazine  
of the performing arts  
July 1977 \$1.95

# THEATRE AUSTRALIA



# THE ROYAL HAYMARKET THEATRE.

## MELBOURNE GARRICK CLUB

Has the honor to announce that it will give a performance at the above Theatre, on

### MONDAY, 1st JUNE, 1863,

### EASTERN HILL VOLUNTEER ORDERLY ROOM

UNDER THE DISTINGUISHED PATRONAGE OF

His Excellency the Governor, Sir Henry Barkly, K.C.B.,  
(President of the Club.)

THE HON. THE CHIEF SECRETARY, JOHN O'SHANASSY, Esq.; THE HON. THE ATTORNEY-GENERAL, R. D. IRELAND, Esq.;  
THE HON. THE TREASURER, W. C. HAINES, Esq.;

The Right worshipful THE MAYOR; COLONEL ANDERSON, Commanding Volunteers, and OFFICERS of the STAFF;  
CAPTAINS RAYN and SPRENT, and OFFICERS and MEMBERS of the VOLUNTEER CORPS.

THE EXCELLENT

## BAND OF THE COLLINGWOOD RIFLES

WILL PERFORM SELECTIONS DURING THE ENTERTAINMENT.

The performance will commence with Tom Taylor's Comedy, in three acts, entitled

# THE VICTIMS.

OR, THE REAL AND THE IDEAL.

Mr. Merryweather (a stock broker) . . . . .	Mr. Jones (a lawyer) . . . . .	Mr. Hanley (an India merchant) . . . . .	Mr. J. B. Paine . . . . .
Mr. Finkerton (a literary gentleman) . . . . .	Mr. S. H. Brown . . . . .	Mr. Battersby (an Irish and London admirer) . . . . .	Mr. W. H. Merriam . . . . .
Mr. Harbottle (an editor) . . . . .	Mr. J. H. Wilson . . . . .	Mr. Haddock (a metaphysician) . . . . .	Mr. Lloyd . . . . .
Mr. Cardie (a sexton) . . . . .	Mr. Marmont . . . . .	Carlisle (Merryweather's butler) . . . . .	Mr. Havers . . . . .
Miss Merryweather . . . . .	Miss Rose (Merryweather's footman) . . . . .	Mr. Devereux . . . . .	
Miss Green (a strong-minded woman) . . . . .	Miss Rose (Merryweather's maid) . . . . .	Miss Devereux . . . . .	Miss Devereux . . . . .
Miss Sharp . . . . .	Miss Green . . . . .	Mrs. Hanley . . . . .	Mrs. Hanley . . . . .

OVERTURE TO "NORMA"

COLLINGWOOD BAND.

After which Mr. W. H. WILLIAMS will sing a new Patriotic Song.

## THE BRITISH VOLUNTEERS

Mus. by J. R. SOTHERS, Esq.; Words by Mr. S. H. BAKER, of the Collingwood Rifles, dedicated to the Colonel Commandant and Volunteers of Toronto.

SELECTION OF IRISH MELODIES.

COLLINGWOOD BAND.

To conclude with Lemus Rode's Farce, in two acts,

## HIS FIRST CHAMPAGNE!

Mr. Martin . . . . .	Mr. W. Devereux . . . . .	Richard Wall . . . . .	Mr. W. H. Merriam . . . . .
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Thomas O'Connell . . . . .	Mr. Marmont . . . . .	Emily . . . . .	Miss Devereux . . . . .
Mr. Martin . . . . .	Miss Green . . . . .	Mrs. Hanley . . . . .	Mrs. Hanley . . . . .
Harriet Bygrave . . . . .	Miss Green . . . . .	Mrs. Hanley . . . . .	Mrs. Hanley . . . . .

Doors open at Seven, to commence at Half-past Seven.

PRICES OF ADMISSION: Dress Circle, 5s.; Stalls, 3s.; Boxes, 2s.; Pit, 1s.

The Box Office will be open on the Saturday previous to and on the day of performance, from 11 to 5 o'clock.

2s. No seats reserved after the rising of the curtain.

J. B. PHILP, Hon. Sec.



## Theatre

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Volume 2 Number 3

## Australia

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### Theatre Nostalgia

left: A theatre handbill  
of 1863 promises a  
night of divers  
theatrical pleasures.

# COMMENT

The two biggest events this year take place in the theatre world of not just the night, stage and touring productions of *A Chinese Love*, and the annual Australian National Playwrights' Conference, where new writers have the chance to assess and work on their plays in workshop with top actors and directors. One of the attractions about two things have in common is the enthusiasm they have given the ANPC over five years and are going to the theatre of this country.

*A Chinese Love* has had one of the most enthusiastic press responses of any musical for years. Though the musical's reputation may waver when the glittering costumes were for the first time and a bit, and the musicals may complain about the scenery, many there are doubts about it, they've done it. Australian dramas have made a show in production (to say in the world they dancing a musical) — despite criticism for May removes (all of) music they if ever be able to cope with such complex business choreography. The greatest disadvantage of all, though, is perhaps the fact that today, and Western are willing to risk hundreds of thousands of dollars on bringing the show which has assumed would most importance to Australia with an Australian cast. Referring to the theatre can result in threat failure or missing innovation, without it there is only one reduction. Because of their success musical theatre here may flourish once more.

Indigenous musical theatre received a reputation, perhaps at the ANPC in the form of Tom Cook's *Black* etc, a work upon about the inside of the Australian rock generation in the South Sea, the place that dropped the bomb on Henderson. Robin Bailey, Jacki Weaver, Kim McQuinn and Chris Hayward sang, danced and acted their way through the past, moving and developing the audience into without us, common or matter. It is the ability to give us access to the sort of original Australian work that makes the conference a major force in the theatre. This year the Australian Council launched back any funding for it at all in the first application, and after which permission gave a much amount later. The ANPC should, and would like, apparently to be entirely self-sufficient, but what such time as it can be, it must ensure funding is a self-sufficient unit institution.

The conference has probably at least broken over the year — thanks in part to the success and efficient administration of Bill Skene of the Old Tote — and the support it has received from many sources has encouraged the conference to work towards the ANPC becoming a permanent and year-round business, as well as the annual meetings working for playwrights, perhaps as a writers' agency, with foreign companies and for new Australian drama, at whatever may be. It has started to do this by making several proposals along these lines, for which it will be lobbying with the appropriate people.

Several of the mechanisms made by the professionals and observers attending, related to change the theatre themselves could hold on for a few all worked together, rather than seeing each other only in terms of rivalry. The setting up of a fund for writers, in financial workshops of new Australian work, from which they're paying in two per cent royalties on all out-of-copyright writers. It was also suggested that they band together and agree only to pay a five per cent royalty rate for all overseas plays, though a note in particular was asking a great deal more, and if anyone should be receiving high royalties it is Australian writers who will not be taking the money out of the industry. Again on the subject of exports, it was agreed that the conference should risk all theatre companies to reduce their bringing in of certain directors and actors in one main visit, and risk the Australian Council and other funding bodies not to finance the travel of imported directors and performers. In addition to these recommendations the funding agency will be asked to fund a sign by amount they will have to be paid to produce Australian plays.

An address to the conference this year was a film and TV school working at the advice of the local TV station. This appeared to be successful, but had problems negotiating with the financial side of the operation. Perhaps this is symptomatic of the industry in general, and the conditions posed on the matter was that TV and film producers should try to cut directors from the best theatre and vice versa to its courage cross-reflection between the two media. There was a strong feeling, too, that regional TV stations should be encouraged to make drama locally, and could be helped a lot by their community theatre friends. Richard Wootton gave the artistic director's report of the 1977 conference.

A good many theatre critics attended the last weekend of the Playwrights' Conference and one of the most discussed was that of importance in review and how far it could be reliable, among from the questionnaire which now appears in the *Letters* page.

Jacki Weaver (not this month's cover) says what she thinks the ANPC does for Australian theatre, and award winner (Best Actor, NSW) John Gaden explains why he is necessary to leave Australia for a time and return to work that he loves.

As the National Professional Theatre Award winner for 1976 following their announcement at the end of May in Canberra, appear on page 15. Were they the ones you picked?

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## “QUOTES & QUERIES”



### SYMPATHY ESTABLISHED

**JANE WRAY**, actress: “I don’t see what John Osborne says the Playwrights’ Conference is for. It can’t help but be valuable for all concerned — writers obviously, but actors, directors and observers too. I think something I’ve gained from it is sympathy. I’ve talked to a lot of people whose I otherwise never would. It’s a great leveller: with everyone being together for two weeks in the university hall. It has suddenly made the realisation, too, that people like Richard [Wyndham] and myself have become establishment figures, and younger writers and directors are talking to us in the same disabused way as we used to to actors.”

“The actor lives in the business 15 years — since I was 15 — and I’ve never been out of work or had to get another job. I am myself acting always. I don’t want to direct. And if I have to work, and I always have had to, that’s the best thing for me.”

“The next thing in, of course, *Three Stripes at the Time*, which is a wonderful play. I’ve never wanted to play one of the sisters, never felt I’m the type, but but what is so awful. I will have to understand her, feel for her, and make her audience very subtle — probably lots of people in the audience will be just like her.”

### WE’LL DO IT

**GERALD BLENDLELL**, *Mojo Productions*: “We open on 1 July with Benjamin Franklin which should provide us with some starting capital. At the same time we’re going to start a late-night show, the new *Heatbeat* (sic) (sic) Williams’s play, *Passcock* & *East Wall House*, and (unlike) theatre, perhaps with *Four Corners*. We hope to get on *Kerka Hartman*’s play *Devon Girl*, which I was very impressed with at the Playwrights’ Conference. We

have backing from the Victorian Arts Ministry for the venue, three years’ lease at Melbourne Playhouse Theatre, and applications in everywhere for further money grants.”

“We plan, too, to be doing regular workshop readings along the lines of the Playwrights’ Conference, as a two-weekly event for the public. The *Age* newspaper may be coming in on this. Other things will be movie performances, theatre music at off-times, performances of Berg or Beethoven/Wendy songs, musical reviews late at night, changing statistics and writers constantly. And children’s theatre. You name it.”

### WIDER AUDIENCES FOR WORKSHOPS

**VICTOR EMILIANOW**, *Booth Pardon Theatre*: “It seems a good idea that the work done at the National Playwrights’ Conference should be seen by an audience outside the confines of the conference who would be made aware of the latest trends in Australian playwriting.”

“The Booth Pardon Theatre will sit at the head for a number of the plays workshoped at the conference for a short demonstration season beginning in late June. As many of the original casts are available will be used. Details will be widely publicised.”

### DON’T MAKE WAVES, MATE

**John Tucker** will be directing *Don’t Publicise the Wind*, Mate by Kenneth Ross, going on at June Street, Sydney, in July. The play was workshoped at the Playwrights’ Conference and had a short run at the Space, Adelaide, in June.

**JOHN TUCKER**: “The myth of Australia as a land of rugged individualism is a long one dying deep to everyday proof that this country is so far from a degree where individualism, the reformist, and even the economic is viewed with hostile suspicion.”



“In *Don’t Publicise the Wind*, Mate, the protagonists’ refusal to pay a union racial levy is simply a catalyst setting his fellow-workers and family against a man who insists on making his own

decisions on his own life.”

“To see this play as about ‘workers’ is to evade the major issues. Kenneth Ross has raised A1 film making, the union-busting aspect struck me most — I think all directors and actors tend to see the problems of a play first — but, on re-reading, I find it is an important play, as it is dealing with bigger issues than any Australian playwright has tackled recently.”

“It is the individual against society, it questions marriage and the family structure.”

“The older Australia of the man character is represented with the younger conformers who are trapped in this conformism. They can’t take stands because of the way of life they have been taught to lead, the motto emblazoned on Australia’s coat of arms at present is ‘Don’t Make Waves’. But all the characters are clearly sympathetic. A woman often does have to suffer for her men’s actions — look at *Strife’s* women.”

### RELATES FOR PERTH

**WILTON MORLEY**, managing director, *Perthshire Productions*: “When we have actually done it to take on an old 1,200-seat Perth theatre which used to be a cinema where Dorothy Hewitt’s father put on shows. [See “The Crystal Palace Starts a New Life in the town of Theatre Australia”] It is the only alternative commercial venue in Perth, Edgely could Her Majesty’s to the Government and now it’s being renovated and won’t be ready for two years.”

“*Seven Years’ Time* and *Benjamin Franklin* have been whopping successes, among other reasons partly because *Salvage*, when the Royal stands, is a handy suburb a bit like Balmain in Sydney, and also because my partner is the, Internat, art rock promoters and they can attract a lot of young people (though *Benjamin* attract young people anyway).”

“Now we find we’re running up against the same problem that J. C. Williamson’s did: the difficulty of keeping the theatre going with shows. Most shows are expensive, and therefore too expensive. If you don’t get one-handers or two-handers, I don’t know what you do. I’m planning to mount some shows at the Regal and then take them on tour. I hope to do that with *John Paul George*, *Mojo* and *Don’t Publicise the Wind*, in September.”

“I think Perth people would respond very well to that, they’re just like people everywhere, but they always get everything about three years late. Ross’ *Brooklyn* is

also interested in the video and would like to bring over anything suitable he has.

#### FRAM DIVERSIFICATION

**JOHN THORP, Australian Performing Grants:** "We see it as diversification of the product — very much the kind of thing that was talked about in the Industries Assistance Commission report. We're hoping for a wider audience for theatre music, or rock music, which is what *Songs for Cinema* is."

"We've taken an aggressive stand as the contrast of their record enclosed under the label APO Records on 6 June, and so we'll get a much better return than the usual five per cent royalties. We are taking a financial risk, but the response so far has been very good."

"That's just a start. Also in the sound field we're doing a radio series called *Downside Counterpoint* for ABC and a *High Power* show for them too. I don't know what else will come out of that in the way of records or whatever."

"We're making a film of *Donkards*, and are negotiating with two TV channels about a national series of *The Riffs*; we have to decide who will do it best — the product has to be really good in a question of maximizing response and audience."

#### DEADEND?

**MIKE MORRIS, director** (who has recently returned to Perth from the Elia Drama School in London and is now temporarily lecturing at WAIT): "New York was disastrously alive. I saw some very interesting, excellent new work by new young directors and writers — especially the work of two writers, David Rabe and Chris Darius. During had a better, cool and funny play on the theme of the Vietnamisation of New Jersey to-air."

"But London — sad, dead. Nothing new. I include *The Royal Court*. The New End is moribund. The only vitality there is in the work of various ensemble players. The much-vaunted new National was as boring as hell, a race building, but otherwise boring."

"I'm convinced that small companies and the development of small community groups is the way theatre is going and the only way it will remain viable in Britain."

#### ARMIDALE OTHELLO

**DENNIS BRADSHAW:** "The Armadale Theatre Project sponsored by the Old Time Theatre Company and the Australian Theatre for Young People has been operating since February, although little or no news of its activities has appeared in the media. A fully professional company — six actors, a director and a manager — based in Armidale serves the New England and the NSW North-East region with plays, workshops and seminars."

"If its production of *Othello* (conceived



in May in the Drama Theatre of the University of New England) is anything to gaily, the company is doing work of high culture. With a minuscule cast (two women, five men — one of them manager John Newby) and an almost bare stage (a rear wall of grey-painted flats with two doors), director Raymond Oswald achieved an electrifying version of the play noteworthy for its unfashionable and for its attention to Shakespeare's verse."

"One hopes that the project will succeed — the company is certainly offering the Armadale region fine professional theatre as part of its share of the cultural subsidy."

#### WE SOLVE PROBLEMS

**CHRISTINE DI NISTON, Stage Consultants:** "I've started being Consultants because I've been around for 12 years in a stage producer and director and there has also been an incredible lack in this area. And since J. C. Williamson's left Sydney there has been nowhere even to have further plans."

"We will solve any problems, from a phone call about where a particular prop or article can be located, to supplying the set and props for an entire production. We have a pool of 50 technicians in all fields whom I can call on. If sets require building, we will have workshop space and technical staff available."

"We're starting with very little and building up as the jobs come in. Stage Consultants will also act as an agency for technicians, which is a very new thing in theatre, though there is already one for film people."

"I have worked for the MTC, Newrad, Marine Street, Independent, Alpha Children's Theatre and Canberra Rep, and I hope to be working closely with all the theatre companies."

"Care should be an necessary approach because I've also just spent six months observing staging and lighting techniques in 15 countries, and much of this is quite new to Australia."

"And I'm used to working on all sorts of ranges of budgets."

#### DESIGNING FOR FRED

**WENDY DICKSON, designer** (winner of the Best Designer award and art director

of *The Choir of Jesus Blacksmith*): "I haven't actually started working yet, a part from research in my still location hunting."

"We've been driving around New South Wales in the James Governor area, but we've been rather held up by floods."

"Of course it's very exciting to be working with Fred Schepans on such a major film — and in a huge I think there are 60 locations, it will be shot over 17 weeks with a pretty large cast — many black. It is a period film — 1900 — but not self-consciously so. Fred wants it to be more documentary in style, just cutting in on people's lives."

"In the past I've designed both sets and costumes, which is very taxing, here Rosie Perleberg will be the costume designer, though we'll work very closely."

"There is a lot of difference between designing for the stage and for film, and I've only recently been able to exploit the difference. The camera seems to film, as, as a designer, you can't make such a complete statement, and you don't have any absolute control over interpretations. Film has to be realistic, but you can be much more detailed."

"Each has its own appeal. I like the constraints of working in theatre, and the greater physical size of film. It's really the same relationship with the actors, though perhaps you are more able to design to suit their personalities in film."

#### WELCOME BACK

**ERIK BLACKWORTH, Music Left Theatre Movement:** "The *Gilbert Green Show* will be a welcome-back to revue for Gilbert Green. She started in revue in 1965 at the Philip Street Theatre — the show was called *A Capote Tea, a Revue and a Good Lie Down* — and it ran for 14 months between Sydney and Melbourne."

"It's nice that she will be back with William Orger. The show opens at the end of July and will run until January, I think it will be a great success."

#### EXTRAORDINARY ITEM

**DAVID COLVILLE, director of publicity, Australian Opera:** "On the second-last page of the Australian Opera's annual report for 1976 a note headed 'Extraordinary item' states that the AO had had to write off \$200,000 owed to it by the Australian Council since 1971, which related to a subsidy short fall arising from a change in funding by the council from a financial year ending 30 June to a calendar year basis."

"The Opera has also had to increase expenditure because of reduced funding to the Trust, which has had to retrench 12 members of its opera orchestra."

"We have simply had to take the retrenched members of the orchestra back and add them to our payroll, an extra 12 people to pay throughout the season now at a great deal of money, but we can't possibly allow the drop in artistic standards that would otherwise occur."



# LETTERS

Mr Robert Page,  
Theatre Australia

Dear Mr Page,

In reply to your letter of 24th May

Our objection to your choice of critics relates to those people directly connected with the management of companies. We do not object to critics in any dual capacity as playwrights, publishers, actors or play directors, providing they have a possible vested interest in the success or failure of the productions they are criticising. Adversely, sometimes this is a delicate field of choice, but a generally impartial viewpoint ought to be the paramount deciding factor, in any case of doubt.

At the time of Jack Hibbard writing the strategies of *The School for Scandal* and *The Game of Love and Chance*, he was definitely connected with the running of the Prism Playhouse. We have seen no formal announcement of his having severed his connections with that organisation, in line of this, we must assume that his commitment to the group continues.

Garric Hutchinson likewise, is a fairly connected with the management of Ideopha Productions. Therefore we consider that Garric continuing to act as a critic of other Melbourne companies is unethical. (Yes, we have read the matter with the Editor of *The Australian*, and his answer has been to appoint another critic.)

Of the six critiques mentioned in your letter, four of them were written by Jack Hibbard and Garric Hutchinson. A fifth was the review of *The Bold Trolley* by Katherine Robinson. As Catherine Ross, with which Miss Robinson is associated, is shortly to publish the Trilogy, this again seems to us a less than correct choice. (Even though it may be argued to have worked to our advantage.)

What we are asking is that critics deemed to review Melbourne Theatre Company productions should be as clearly non-partisan as possible. We do not regard Jack Hibbard and Garric Hutchinson as being in that category, and we are not prepared to invite either of these critics to make future productions.

Yours sincerely,  
John Sumner,  
Director,  
Melbourne Theatre Company

11th May, 1977

Mr John Sumner,  
Director,  
Melbourne Theatre Company

Dear John,

I can't say that I am very enthusiastic about the way you have taken it upon yourself to make complicated what was a very straightforward situation. What has resulted from your action is a good deal of confusion from a number of people in the theatre and the press. Your interference in my case has moved their activities of others, such as Robin, Gifford and Robinson have been being in a quandary, as well as those of yourself. Many people find it difficult to discriminate in principle between a person writing a play for a major company whilst a critic, running a major company whilst being a member of leading organisations, and running a theatre whilst being a critic.

In any event it had been my intention to resign from the *Australian* on June 30, which information you could have discovered by telephone. I would have hoped we were acquainted sufficiently for you to do so.

On the other hand, I do not intend to cease writing for *Theatre Australia*, which has a function dissimilar to that of a daily newspaper.

I hope we can maintain the friendly and co-operative relations we had in the time of our session at Grand Street.

Yours sincerely,  
GARRIC HUTCHINSON

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## AT THE MATINEES: "MOTHER GOOSE" A DELIGHTFUL PANTOMIME

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# Vaudeville Follies



**Left R: Doreen, Nina, Nola, Pat, Pam & Sue. Sorlie's, 1937.**

## Peter Kenna tells of some terrifying moments in tent shows and such

The night *The Mills Family Show* opened at Sydney's Beauds Pavilion Theatre, Wanda Hills tore down the premises outside screaming the terrible message that her Gimmey had probably been taken by the waves. Then he had a violent argument with his father in the foyer and disappeared into the lavatory. Later in the evening he was too accused by his strict Auntie of being a compulsive bed-wetter. She had been dipping in the ocean himself and wasn't able to remove one of her Progress's flippers. She appeared in

the opening number with a flapping grotesquely bearded the smart little high-heeled sandals she wore on her other feet. Of course the orchestra didn't arrive at all and a rather squally Florry Hills was driven to ensure the audience was provided the adventure of booms, bangs and abba-dabba-dabba to cushion itself.

The Frane Factory was in town giving weight to the rumour that it is going to be the main touring theatre company in Australia.

Not all of the show comes off, mind you, but the rest of the acting is always there to bounce you over the boring bits. A lot of people talk about Ensemble Acting, and many of them think they're doing it, when you see the Frane Factory at work there's no doubt in your mind that, at last, you're watching the real thing.

However, the purpose of this piece is not to crit the show. I've been asked to write about it in relation to real Australian Variety which, as it is expressed in *The Mills Family Show*, is now, alas, all but dead. But looking back into even our most recent past, we discover there existed quite a few troupes in *The Mills* tradition—bigger and more polished, of course, and, thank God, not as disaster-prone, but basically aiming for the same thing: to provide cheap, family entertainment for simple people whose tastes differed considerably from those of the more blasé

capital-city dwellers.

Sorlie's is the name that comes immediately to mind. Until 1966 they travelled the agricultural show route, following the sun in a big tent that could park well over a thousand people under its four-kay-pole spread, never playing on the showground but in the town, because they considered themselves not above the multi-millionaire people. Sorlie was a Negro married to an arresting, very fair woman named Grace. Every performance, she would stand at the entrance to the tent "selling tickets" dressed in a formal evening-gown and wearing drop earrings so heavily encrusted with diamonds they permanently lightened the lobes of her ears. Behind them, painted to the knees, was a marching band in the shape of a crocodile. From time to time, some very famous Australian artists worked for Sorlie's: Peter Finch and Gloria Deane, to name two.

But for a real family show you have to turn to Baynes's Follies. Roy Baynes managed the business side of the venture, but his brother and sister were the show's comedians and comedienne, and his daughter danced. Eventually she married a director, which increased the family's involvement in the evening's entertainment. Also, the Great Levinsky, a very popular dancer, had a show in which his daughter danced. Mack's, Little's,

Peter Kenna was born in Belmont, Sydney, in 1935. After a variety of jobs, he decided to become a radio writer. He wrote programmes as a playwright in 1959 with his third play, *The Shepherd of Sonnet Forest* (a Ray Charles play-in-Gladi). *Bill in the Moon*, *Murder's Palace*, *Laurel Comedy*, *A Word God and Testament* and *The Provençal* which have all been produced in Australia.

EXILES



# Vaudeville Follies

## Mrs Grace Sorlie

Columbia's, Cole's, the shows varied in size but operated all over the country. Sometimes they were popped side by side in appearance to each other.

During the late twenties, my eldest brother, James, worked on a tour boat with Roy Bell's troupe. During a "time out," he was walking the roads of the Darling Downs and came upon a small circus and rodeo run by the Clinton brothers and attached himself to them for a while. They played only the minor festivals of the area, leaving the good-sized towns (and possibly more critical audiences) to the big concerns such as Ward's and Solo Brothers. On arriving at a place, they would put up their "sides" in circle of houses or canvas without a tent, and then sit down with their musical instruments to deliver a grand Harry Clinton played a nightman's.



Musical drama, Charlie a clown and Uncle Tom a cornet. The show's clown and tramp-jump order, a high-gusto Aboriginal nicknamed Red Harry, roamed on the ground. When the audience did arrive, the pretty, 16-year-old Daphne Clinton was ready at her knock-on-down mood and she and James sold balls and presented boxes of chocolates to the lucky winners until the family was ready to start the show inside. Daphne then joined them as the major attraction. She would fly the trapeze, walk the slack-rope and perform acrobatics posed on the backs of waiting women while her proud father, the ringmaster, cavorted her talents to the audience.



THE ACTRESS

(The Art Show)

Clinton Down's grandsons on her mother's side were circus people too and their daughters, Toots, Gags and Zilla (Gloria's mother) worked with them in various acts. Later the three girls went into Variety at The Weatherly Station. They performed an acrobatic-contestional number wherein Zilla appeared out of a silver wheeled dressed as a Frog, Toots appeared as a Fairy and Gags got there somehow as a Crocodile.

But to return to *The Hills*, the chief delight of that show is in the disasters which lie in wait to trip them up, of being out on. They see the staff of nightmen



for all entertainers and you can only laugh about them afterwards because you're so damn glad they're over. Grumpy (Harry Hills), the only real pro in the family, fell out of her wheelchair on to her face mismanaging the show's intermission. Mary, the 13-year-old child prodigy, has her music confused by injury during a piano solo and prevents the audience with a parade of ballroom waltzes of nearly every popular classic you can name — some of them played with the music upside down. It was these preordained disasters, and sometimes teaching students, in the show which decided me to ask them a story.



## Patrons, Sorlie's, 1953



saved for this article to record their own surviving or pleasurable moment in the theatre.

Gloria Dawn was playing Cinderella in pants once and appeared at the top of the staircase in the ballroom scene looking just like Cinderella should look on arriving to meet Prince Charming. She was wearing a costume of soft, flowery frills. When she began to move, she realized something was wrong and correctly surmised that part of her skirt had caught on a nail. However, the rule at "Never look back. Keep smiling. Go forward." She did — and arrived at Prince Charming's side with just the fringe of the crinoline and a petticoat on the lower part of her body.

I once saw a production of *Cinderella* in which the Fairy Godmother appeared in the kitchen (singing songs about the conflicts). A twist of her wand and Cinderella's rags became a glittering ball-dress. She changed the pumpkin into a coach and the mice into footmen. Learning in triumph, she discovered the door was jammed and she couldn't get out!

## Gloria Dawn





Stanley Holloway weighed in with a story about a mistake in the English provinces during the tour of *The Casanova*. Apparently the cove they were playing had never heard of the show's phenomenal six-year run in the West End. There were exactly a dozen people scattered about the auditorium when they began their opening number. Half way through this, an idiot appeared leading a late-comer down the aisle. "For God's sake," one of the actors shouted at him from the stage, "Don't wait that man! He'll make trouble."

Tharra Rogers, once the mistress in *Parlova's* company, also appeared in the London production of Max Reinhardt's *The Miracle*. The interior of the theatre was transformed into a cathedral and all the celebrities were dressed as such. So too were many of the players, of course, including Tharra, who had to make her entrance from the foyer and move down the aisle up on to the stage. At one performance, a late-comer mistook her for an



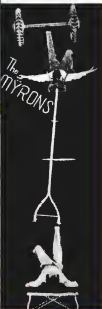
**Stanley Holloway**

out for someone to rescue him before he falls off his controller's knee, reminded me of two ventriloquist stunts, again told me by my brother James. He once walked the streets of the outback with a cane who carried a doll in his swing and "shewed" wherever he met a group of people. Another ventriloquist he knew appeared in a small tent on the showgrounds. On one occasion, they were playing a far-flung outpost where the children were unused to seeing other white people, let alone a talking doll. One of the children was swinging from the tent's supporting pole and gnawing the ventriloquist's appeal for him not to do so. The act hadn't begun yet and the doll was lying hidden on a table. Suddenly,



the man grabbed it and pushed it at the child while it shouted, "If you don't stop swinging on that pole I'll swing from your bloody neck!" The child fell backwards open-mouthed and then began screaming. They could well hear him screaming even after he had reached the security of the air conditioning booth.

And Granny falling out of her shocker reminded me of a story told me by a cousin, Myra Morgan. She was with Coleman's Follies about the same time



**BOBBY LE BRUN**

substitute and followed her blindly until she found herself, dropping silver-ten and trailing crêpe-de-chêne, sleep-bung in the middle of a Medieval celebration, with no idea in the world of how to get out of it. Mr Reinhardt was the inventor of Tourist Theatre.

Faunoy Hills's ventriloquist act, during which he goes to sleep and the doll comes

## VAUDEVILLE FOLLIES



James was with Nell. Her act was an acrobatic walk performed in unison with another girl before a frontalists while a scene was being changed. It included a series of "slow dances" which means simply turning over back words continuously supported by your hands. Anyway, one night Myra failed to estimate correctly the space available to her and "slip-trick-kick" herself right off the edge of the stage and into the percussion section of the orchestra.

Queenie Paul clocked in with a much tender moment. She was playing *The National* in Sydney (now the *Mayor Cinema*) for Sir Ben Fuller, who at the same time was about to open the St James (now *Donna* club). Every show she had been in for him had been a success and so,

on the night before the St James was to open, he called her over after her own show to "sing back" into the building. She stood on the bare stage and, wearing an ornate-pendant and with only Sir Ben and a few waiters on in the stalls, she put all her heart and hope into "Cheermeum" for him.

Roscoe Hay, the choreographer and a stalwart of *Variety* through nearly four decades, remembers staging a Deep South number at the Troika ("My dear, there were Minstrels swarming from the rafters") featuring Irene Hayes and real rain, which was supposed to fall from the



flies into a rough frontalists. But a didn't. It rained, and all the "Darkies" were transformed into bedraggled "Whites" before the eyes of a startled audience.

Ray Cook, at present musical-directing at *Chorus Line* in London, has a whole bag of disaster stories. My favourite is the one about the one-show he was playing piano for which used ultra-violet lights in one of the chambers. You know, things glow in the dark. Well, so do your teeth, so you have to keep your mouth closed while you're

## LUCKY GRILLS (Atomic Comic)



singing. One night a shaver turned the wrong way on a production number and they all went down like oranges! Out of nowhere 15 years of screaming teeth manifested!

And as for on the stories, go — only lack of space allows me *Opera*, *Ballet*, *Drama*, *Variety* no one is safe. There is already a crop of disaster stories building up around the club scene. I'll conclude with one of those. It's also the ultimate "Ugly Duck" anecdote.

A while ago a very well-known Negro singer was performing at an RSL club in Sydney before an audience totally unaccustomed to his art. They talked among themselves, showed drunk orders in the women and played the poker-machines loudly. He left the stage in some distress, to be followed by a comedian who faced even less well because he was rather noticeably effeminate in manner. They turned their attention to him all right, and chaos ensued. Finally, the club's entertainment officer was forced to run out on to the stage and gesture them with an ultimatum: "Listen, you muckheads," he shouted. "Give the Paul a go or I'll bring the bloody back."

## Dummies: Hills Family Show



★ Don't ★  
Forget Our Slogan:  
**IT'S ALWAYS  
A GOOD SHOW  
AT SORLIE'S**

'I want to try to sort out where my artistic roots are . . .'

## THE HEAD AND THE HEART

John Gaden played Henry Carr for the second time in this year's revival of the famous production of *Forresters* and his performance was rapturous with young audiences. To help him with his prep abroad, Michael gave him a benefit night, which was attended by most of the luminaries of Sydney Theatre.



### John Gaden, one of our finest actors, tells *Theatre Australia* why he has decided to go abroad

**Question:** Let's start with you, John Gaden, the documen-tairist man.

**Gaden:** I was brought up in Sydney — Double Bay. I'm 35. Educated in Sydney, Sydney University. I did mostly theatre there, and studied arts and law from 1959 to 1966. It was a very happy time. University drama was going through a terrifically high point, a very active time. SIDS began to produce theatre of the absurd in Australia, Pinter was pioneered there with good productions of *The Birthday Party*, and others. That's where I got my grounding, and it's been a good and bad thing. A bad thing because for a long time I had quite an over-awed idea of theatre, I was a little contemptuous of popular culture, which I'm not now. We're a very material society: a lot of people spend their lives getting and spending, especially with the death of the Church, which happened here in a big way towards the end of the 1800s, and I think theatre provides that sort of community experience now. People can come into a theatre from their three bedrooms and two cars and laugh or cry at something that doesn't normally touch them.

**Q:** Would you actually consider the use of the theatre with the fall of the Church?

**Gaden:** No, but it's an interesting thought! It's significant that a lot of our best theatre people had a strong Catholic upbringing: John Bell, Peter Carroll, Noel Fitzpatrick, Rex Blair, Peter Kenna . . . John was very devout at university — not that I mean his acting and directing styles are Catholic! But there is something about what the Church gave people, a life beyond the getting-and-spending one, and a sense of theatre I suppose. We seem to need that as a group, and TV can never quite do that, as it's a more private experience while theatre is communal.

**Q:** Were you religious?

**Gaden:** Yes, very.

**Q:** And now?

**Gaden:** No, I suppose I'm agnostic really. I don't know, and I doubt strongly, but said I was 17 I was deeply religious.

**Q:** Manned Theatre started in 1971 with a lot of people who were all at the university together, went their separate ways and came back together. What did you do in the intervening five years?

**Gaden:** I got into the business. John Tinker, who was the director of the South Australian Theatre Company, had applied for people to come for the Young Elizabethan tour. Peter Butler, who'd been at university with me, was the classical music arranger for the ABC and happened to be looking over Tinker's shoulder as he was looking at my photograph. And Peter said, "That's John Gaden, I've seen him in things at the university — he's good." So I

got the job. Everything's led on from there. I did two Young Elizabethan tours around South Australia, worked for six months at Theatre 62 where John Edmondson was running it, playing off leads, including Lear — the full lot — which was an amazing way to work. Then a NSW tour playing a dragon, six months at St Martin's, Melbourne, when it was run by Irene Mitchell, and when I first worked with Barbara Stephens I met Sandy [McGowan] there, too, when I lived with — and have just stopped living with — for six years. They didn't pay rehearsal money in those days, when I arrived, I was living in a tiny flat in North Carlton and I had literally no money. I had to walk from North Carlton to St Martin's, which was right the other side of town, and back every day, and work in a six-week before and after hours. A very character-building time!

**Q:** You must have been very convinced that the business was going to be good to you?

**Gaden:** I suppose I was, though I honestly never thought of it in those terms. You know you've got a certain talent, but I just wanted to work in those days. I've worked almost continuously since I went into the business, a lot of it's been with Ed rather than him doing, but I've never stopped.

It was then that I went to Perth and joined a company Anne Neeson had formed in the Octagon Theatre on the university campus. At the end of that time, Gaden came to Perth, he'd been out here doing *Onkaparinga* in Sydney and *All's Well* in



Melbourne, and he came because he had an association with the Odeons, which he'd helped to design. He did three one-week readings, *The Power of God*, *The Prince of Hohenheim* and *The Prince of Love*. He played the Voice of God, of course, which was wonderful. I was in *The Prince of Hohenheim*, and we really hit it off. It really wasn't an unbreakable situation, I just fell in love with him, I think. And I think it was he who got me placed in *Godfather* when it went on tour — I took over as Chorus Leader.

From then, I went into *The Crucible* at Praeger, for the Tote, joined the Tote Company at the Parade and stayed with them till 1974-75 through into the Opera House period. It was a good company. We worked hard and did a lot of plays: *Richard III* at the Opera House, *Love for Love*, Bill Gaskill's version of *Love's Labour's Lost*, a new play by Michael Boddy called *Crucible of Wrecked*, and back at the Tote, John's [John Bell's] productions of *The Good Woman of Setzuan*, *How Could you Believe me When I Said I'd Be your Father when you know I've done a Lie all my Life?* [Torrific] *The Tempest of the Shrew*, George Ogilvie's *Young Periwinkle of the Walls*, and so it goes on. An amazingly busy time. I did odd things for the MTC, like the *Lavender play The Man who Shot the Archbishop*, with Frank Thring and Lee McKinn — that was a pretty bad experience — which really led up to the period of going back to Nimrod.

First I went to Melbourne for the six-month voice course with Rowena Below. Just to November 1975. That was a big turning-point for me, I decided to do the course because I didn't know that I wanted to go on being an actor. Certainly I didn't want to go on being an actor in Australia — not because I felt better, but because I didn't feel stretched any more. The course with Rowena stretched me. It was hard work, five days a week, 10 till five. Long and often frustrating, but I came out of it feeling really excited. I felt I had somewhere to go for the rest of my career at theatre.

Q: You touch it now, don't you?

Gaskin: Yes. Sometimes with, sometimes not so well. It's basically a method of voice production, not just speech education, but where the impulse for a sound comes from, how it gets out of the body, how we organize it, orchestrate it, or don't, in letting it go. It has a good deal to do with the kind of actor who can just be, rather than represent, so it's directly geared to the Method and Stanislavsky, though not consciously so. The basic technical source involves using energy normally put into tension in other areas, both the release of sound and the physical being and experiencing on stage. It doesn't suit everyone, but it suited me as a very tense person and a very tense actor. I went straight out of that and into *Travesties*, and I don't think I could have done anything better, as it required me to come immediately into contact with difficult areas of the work, which do you do with plays that a non-year-old naturalist? I feel *Travesties* was a great

step forward for me.

Q: In the 18 months you've been at Nimrod you've done in some sense to epitomize the best of the Nimrod style. Were you happier there than at the Tote? Gaskin: I've certainly been happy at Nimrod — because I've been playing some



poetry race roles — not that that always makes me happy. And because I like working continuously, although I have learned now that I'm going to have to start cutting down because I've found, whether it's a phenomenon of old age or a greater amount of input to a production, that I can't maintain the workload and thus pace, performing and rehearsing at the same time. When I came to start work on *Young Mc* I felt, "I'm so fucked I have no energy to put into that. I can't work." And it was only in the third week that I passed the panic button and came up with some ideas. I don't like working that way, and it was a lesson to me. I've got to start pacing and spacing myself a little more. I think the more experience you get the harder it gets, harder to make your choices and decisions.

While, like anyone in any organization, I have my criticisms of Nimrod, I want to continue working there because I think it's a theatre that, because of its financial structure, size limitations and lack of sufficient subsidy, cannot get away with long-ply presentation. They have to rely on innovation and the quality of the productions to get by on its own. I think that the more established theatre companies like the Tote and the MTC are getting into areas where they are catering to their subscribers, and there's nothing particularly wrong with that except that it doesn't seem very exciting or revealing. Candidates for actors are better, but I think what has been lost is that immediate need to get audience.

Q: So Nimrod's at the lights and the Tote and the MTC in the safety net?

Gaskin: Much more at the lights, and you find it there as an actor. I'm very much concerned with how many people are in every night. I'm also very concerned about the fact that I think our seasonal periods there are a week too short in every slot, but I understand why they have to be. Ultimately I'm convinced that a good theatre operates on personal merit.

Q: What about those Poms coming over?

Gaskin: I think it has to be drawn, but it's very hard to know where. Stuff like *Dead End? Dicks* are second-rate pieces being hogged off to the public. We're needed as a place for out-of-work British actors to come and make a little money, and they take that money away and do nothing for the theatre. The Trust say they only offer management services, but I know people who've approached them for these services for local productions, and been refused. Why isn't the Royal being filled with the local product — commercial strings for the Nimrod March, *A Handful of Friends*, *Old Tote Melbourne*?

Q: The Trust apparently lost money on *Ed Norton*.

Gaskin: Losing money's a great pity, but I would have thought that, according to their charter, they're not primarily a money-making concern. Of course, if there's no money they can't promote theatre, but there's no evidence that they're making a planned — and I mean planned — investment in Australian theatre.

We may have things like the RSC, Grotowski, Marcel Marceau because drama is so international as much as a national thing. It's important to see what other countries are doing because it's a slightly altered state of consciousness. Personally I don't want *The Pleasure of Mr. Campbell*, but there's a hell of a lot of people who do, and who am I to say they shouldn't have it?

Q: Should the last, then, be qualitative or quantitative?

Gaskin: It's a confusing area. My immediate concern is. Look how much imported stuff is coming out here. It doesn't look to be of very high quality, but again who am I to say that? I look at drawing a qualitative line, but at a time when theatre is languishing in Australia, we're not going to reveal that it is not by saying we can't do this, but someone people can.

There's also the problem far as our here of having our heads in the Old World and our hearts in the New World. We're caught up in that bad by tradition, as theatre we're traditionally in the Old World of English rep and the English literary tradition from the basic sources of Shakespeare right through the canon of English drama. I am fifth-generation Australian, yet what turned me on to theatre was not *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll* or *Love From*, but Chekhov, Brechtian drama, Jarry, Marlowe, *Ramona* and *Timberlane* particularly were the things that made me want to become an actor. I've run into a terrible problem with seeing or doing Shakespeare in Australia because, well, at

the moment, it's always like a foreign language. The big risk in making it accessible (as John did so well with *Black Swan*) is that you often make it colloquial and lose the spirit, and I have felt that we've been doing a pale shadow of the plays. *Awake and Fearful* remains even if we've been doing them unjust.

We're still a colonial country, perhaps the last in the world, whether we like it or not, and we think that if a canon from elsewhere by the people who "know", that's better. The colonial cringe exists through all the solutions of the arts, and it certainly exists in me. That's one reason why I want to go away and look at it. But we shouldn't encourage people when we know that the work we're seeing is often inferior drama. It may be lightly entertaining, but you must get priorities right and theatre's top priority is what it can do. Light entertainment is done better by TV, the only way we're going to improve is to keep pushing the boundaries of what we can do. We're certainly not going to survive as light entertainment, and not should we hope to.

**Q:** You could argue that David Williamson's plays have little concern for the screen-audience relationship, that Hugo and Williamson are stuck in the picture-frame theatre, and that that could be better done on TV.

**Gordon:** It couldn't because it's too embarrassing. One of the strengths of David's work is a good straight to people's guts. That's why they laugh a lot. Williamson and Hugo are engaging — not in the same way as *Travesties* or *Young Mr. Pitt* but in one of the other functions of theatre, that of presenting people face to face. That's why David's plays are always so comically theatrical, he dares on stage to explore situations which are embarrassing and confront. I don't think you ever knew one of his plays feeling comfortable. They seem to generate a lot of social discussion about who we are, what we're like, who the middle class is, what our hopes and aspirations are. What our spirit really is.

**Q:** He's on the absolute forefront of social thinking and the theatrical art in a combination and very intimate.

**Gordon:** Yes, and by and large I don't think TV can do that. One of the things I heard *On the Edge* drop in an interview — he'd been asked "Why theatre in this age of mass communication?", he said, "Because theatre has a sense of occasion", which is why there may be more in the theatre, or mass, weeping, mass laughter. I think David's and other Australian plays have that quality, so I wouldn't say for a moment they were just as suitable to film or TV.

**Q:** You are very much a theatre actor. Why is that?

**Gordon:** I am, probably more by accident than design. Partly because I need, and have wanted, to keep working, and theatre offers me continuity of work. I'm not good at free-lancing, I get deeply depressed and list, and I continuously need theatre. And that continuity of work as theatre has largely prevented me from hanging out for

work in film and TV. If I want to break into that area it means I'm going to have to take time off to do it. An actor like Johnny Hopkins, who is now becoming a film actor, spends a half of a lot of time on the dock, and it's one of the few ways of ensuring he will get film parts — being available. I was offered work in *Picture Show*, *Mis* and things like that, but I couldn't do it. It goes back to *Between Women*. I was offered the part that Arthur finally played, but I couldn't do it because I was in contract to the *Tote* for *Tu Pity Sir's a Hoax*. Now, had I been free to do that, I might have taken a different direction. I probably would have, but I'm not later or sorry about that. Of course, I'd like to work in film, particularly film, and I guess I will do one day.

**Q:** The star system. You've become a name, most people will go to a show because you are in it. What about the Australian star system? Do you think it would help?

**Gordon:** We could. I have the Hollywood star system here where people could be created by a huge PR machine, because here, if you're going to be a star in theatre, you have to deliver the goods, and not just once but all the time. Here you're as good as you're last production.

**Q:** You're more exposed here?

**Gordon:** Yes. I believe in a star system because I believe there are some people who can deliver the goods all the time, and people will want to come and see them, so of course a star system begins to happen. But I also believe very firmly that a theatre that operates by saying, "We'll get X, Y or Z, they're big names, so it'll be all right" — that's been shown time and time again not to work.

**Q:** Is there anything in the Australian character against a star system, with phrases like "pussy-licking" kicked about?

**Gordon:** I frankly don't believe that. Who are the Australian stars you can think of of the top of your head? John, Ray Livermore, Betty Humphries, Frank Thring? They'll all have their detractors, but they have an enormous following, and they have it because they deliver the goods. People will very quickly snap if you have a failure, but I think they will anywhere. I don't feel we're less tolerant to failure than anyone else. You build up a relationship with an audience, I feel I have with the Marnoo audience.

**Q:** Do you want to make a comeback — to act on stage?

**Gordon:** Of course I would love to work in England. But, you see, making it — and I really think I'm being honest about that — in terms of success money, none, has never been all that important to me. It's important to me only because I can extend into bigger and better roles. If you're working at the top, you can work with better people, better directors. But I do not want the big-money status, the money and the cars. I don't even want a place in history, however minor. But I certainly want to keep working and success is the best way to do it.

**Q:** There's a sort of branding to John Gordon, and you're always an obviously hard-working guy. How far do you depend on technique?

**Gordon:** I find it very hard to work in any other way than in full speech, which means involving myself totally. Sometimes I go on to an audience and realise the laughs have been coming in for the last five minutes but I won't notice. That's a phenomenon of loneliness, and I don't like it, which is why I've got to cut down the load a little bit. I would like, and I think I'm becoming, as an actor, more a vagrant and less pleading with an audience. Quest often the lack of the right kind of arrogance can make one too involved with presentation and not enough involved with oneself on stage. I certainly don't want to be arrogant in the sense of being contemptuous of an audience. The honesty's important.

**Q:** How much do you take out of yourself in acting?

**Gordon:** The more I work, the more for me. I realise that I have to use myself. Whatever moves through me, and however it transforms me, is the movement. Though I wouldn't describe myself as a Method actor, I think all good acting has very much to do with the Method. Stanislavsky was only taking what he thought to be good acting and analysing it. But it does use myself more and more, so it's very important to me what kind of person I am — how the state of my conscience is, where I live, how I behave. It's important to know where I'm at as an actor and a person — and the two I find increasingly inseparable. So this conflict I mentioned about the head and the heart has become a very big one, and is one reason why, I'm going away, probably the main one. I want to try to sort out where my artistic roots are because I feel that only when I get my head and my heart tightly together can I really act.

**Q:** Going away is an enormous leap into the unknown. You've got work, lead roles here, so why leave now?

**Gordon:** It's the need to step for a time. I find I work incredibly. The last cycle started from the *Rowena* Hotel course in Melbourne, now there's another one beginning. I work in great bursts of energy and then I find I need to step and rest and re-evaluate. I need distance sometimes. I also feel it's no good talking and thinking about the British, American and Polish theatre, I must go and see them and sort them out for myself. The fact of going is frightening because I've never travelled. When Narnood decided to give me this break, right, I was absolutely knocked out, you know you have friends, but I didn't know what people really felt about me — and that's been almost too much. I do get a bit weepy every now and then. I think, "Why am I going away and leaving all this?" Well, I'm coming back. The break has brought together a whole lot of ideas and feelings about being in Australia which have never been so strong before. It's certainly going to make it very difficult to stay away for any time. Which is perhaps a good thing! ■

# Preview of an 'adult' production in the Tasmanian Puppet Theatre's new home

Leah Thompson

## SIX PUPPETS IN SEARCH OF A GENRE

THE TROPICAN is a small, tucked-away, 100-seat, 100-year-old building, but it's the heart of the Tasmanian Puppet Theatre's new workshop and theatre, and the road would be *Moussa*, an almost sacred search of six puppets in search of a genre. A new genre is what *Moussa* is all about. It didn't happen overnight and it has a long way to go before it becomes established as a major movement, but it's here and it deserves notice.

It's a small, tucked-away, 100-seat, 100-year-old building, but it's the heart of the Tasmanian Puppet Theatre's new workshop and theatre, and the road would be *Moussa*, an almost sacred search of six puppets in search of a genre.

If we could cross Europe with Tristan Tzara, F. T. Marinetti and Georg Kaiser, we would probably end up with someone like Nigel Triffin. Tarn this magical mixture house in the Tasmanian Puppet Theatre's new workshop and theatre, and the road would be *Moussa*, an almost sacred search of six puppets in search of a genre. A new genre is what *Moussa* is all about. It didn't happen overnight and it has a long way to go before it becomes established as a major movement, but it's here and it deserves notice.

I accepted this invitation to review *Moussa* with a liberal amount of apprehensions, it was billed as an adult puppet show (whatever that is). I expected some sort of cross-fertilisation between *America Murrak!* and *Oh, Calcutta*. My present interest was once more aroused when I arrived at the theatre. The Tasmanian Puppet Theatre is located in Salamanca Place, a history of warehouses near Hobart's Constitution Dock. I had to enter the theatre through a small opening in a large corrugated-iron door. Inside, I

was told I would be viewing a private performance and under no circumstances was I to use the toilets — they hadn't been completed. The foyer of the theatre is on the first floor and takes up nearly half the building. There were several other guests wandering around. Somehow they didn't look the type that would take a puppet delight in puppetry. After the traditional token glass of wine, we were ushered into the theatre and it was a theatre — as the lights came on, not the puppet scene.

I settled into my seat and relaxed. It was a near-perfect little theatre, intimate, but not claustrophobic. I was pleased for my friend Peter Wilson, artistic director and founder of the Tasmanian Puppet Theatre. He has been waiting for a long time for a theatre of his own. For more than seven years, he and his complement of puppets and puppeteers have danced from one end of Tasmania to the other, playing in overcrowded school-rooms and over-sunbaked halls. Peter began his career performing one-man shows, and when he joined the Puppet Theatre, he was viewed as



The Old People from *Moussa*





Moorens

something of an upset, throwing about an idea, insisting that there was more to puppetry than "kiddie's entertainment". He has at least achieved some poetic justice by opening his new premises with a programme orientated towards adults.

Left-handedly, Peter is indebted to the Marionette Theatre of Australia for his success. From the time he opened his first major production, *Hamlet and Gertrude* in 1971, there was always someone who would hold up the name of Peter Scriver's Puppeteers for comparison. In those early days the Marionette Theatre of Australia had Peter Scriver's reputation and the assured financial and ideological support of the Elmhurst Theatre Trust. Peter Wilson had a small grant, a part-time job and lots of gas. In 1973, Peter was awarded a Churchill Fellowship which provided him with the opportunity to study the techniques of puppetry in Japan, Russia, Czechoslovakia, Germany, England and the United States. The influence of this tour on Peter's work is clearly shown by the veritable menagerie

of puppets that hang from the walls and curling of the Tasmannian Puppet Theatre's new second-floor workshop, a mass testimony to 12 major productions and countless minor ones. The spectre may still be behind Peter, but he hasn't had the time or inclination to look back. He has been too busy turning an out-of-pocket dream into a company that now employs a business administrator and eight full-time puppeteers. For myself, after having seen a performance of *Moorens*, I find it difficult to believe that the Tasmannian Puppet Theatre could be over-shadowed by any company.

*Moorens* is, in every sense, an integrated production. The set, designed by Jennifer Davidson, not only creates the atmosphere, it takes an active part in the performance. The stage is dominated by an 11-foot circular disc that rotates during the show. One side of the disc is a large, animated caricature of a woman's face surrounded by an array of coloured circus glasses. Above the disc, on the next floor, the colour has been removed, it is an in-

Left: Moorens  
"A sort of scope of illusion"



Alby the  
Albatross and  
his operator  
from  
*Rob A Dab Dub*



Spav  
from  
*Kash A Dab Dab*

vented platforms used as an acting area for a puppeteer-in-suspense, a Chaudharia figure in a bowler hat who seems to exert control over the performance below. Behind him was a large flaring red flower that opened to reveal a wisp of red light and where fluorescent lights that gave way when he made tea out. The upper stage seemed *barrowed* is the only word that can be used, as there is no dialogue or plot to represent a conscious world, a rough, baroque life that antedated the scene, a mythical world that occupied the lower stage. Four gleaming, alienation leaders controlled the two floors and were used by the performers for entrances and exits.

The show is a cosmogony of illusion. Props and set-pieces appear and disappear, curtain divides descend from above and rise from the floor and become animated to make a passing comment, a table is set for two and a room appears. The massive face on the disc betches smoke and her great mouth opens to become the showcase for a carnival night-club show. There is

even a traditional Punjabi and lady, shown with a scolding ending and multifarious symbolic cut-outs, all combining to make an episodic visual collage. The show has a typical Triffinian about it, an over-indulgent involvement with Dada and the Futurists and the refusal to make a precise connection. But the show is not a badge-pledge, all the pieces fit, adhered by a well-disciplined technique.

The action centres around a faceless, child-size figure removed from a region in the centre of the stage and controlled by three puppeteers dressed in black velvet. All the puppeteers were dressed alike, more for dignity than disguise, as they often bared their faces. Seemingly to float in the air, the faceless child represents a symbolic journey of birth and discovery while being observed and sometimes assessed by elements of the baroque life on the stage show. The child becomes too much for her, and she eventually escapes and is about to be given up to oblivion when her limp body is retrieved by a giant, grotesque bag-like creature that tentatively straps



Above:  
Tabesh Hoshina,  
guest director  
of *Big Noise*,  
left

out of the darkness. The bag is joined by five other creatures of equal size (well over seven feet!), who prod and surround the limp body only, after a much discussion, accede back into the darkness. The old bag is left alone cowering her lifeless form, watching pathetically for someone or something to answer for its premature death. The child is then taken from the bag and inconspicuously delivered to the upper stage. The bag returns to obscurity and the play ends with a usual epilogue. Throughout the play, the action is qualified by the names of Puk Floyd, Ivan Tomita, Brian Egan and King Christian.

Moonana has more to offer than a visual experience. The combination of music, puppetry and mime bears a close resemblance to classical poetry. The performers (in refer to them as puppeteers would not only be unjust, it would be unfair discrimination) make their entrances and exits in slow controlled movements. It had no desire to distance them aesthetically from the performance because they were as much a part of the performance as any of the other devices that were used. They often interacted with their puppets and their deliberate, patient motion set up a tension between the rhythm and the nature of the piece. When it seemed the storm would be too much it was restrained by the Chaplinesque figure on the parapet high above the stage. He created illusion upon illusion until he exploded himself into a bouquet of hearts and streams.

Moonana is like a Dorian tale, a delicately that is sometimes grotesque, sometimes elegant. Its centre is questionable rather than accepted, and is restrained by the time it takes to complete an action and not by the stress placed on its individual components. It is all very controlled and very professional. To me, the most impressive and welcome part of the programme was the appearance of the giant bag-like puppets that floated in and out of the darkness like bubble-walves together. They spoke no dialogue, but their movements, linked to the music of Ivan Tomita, provided them with an abstract language. They were not and likely neither are and surely passed the capacity of the audience. There is no doubt that Moonana appeals less on the emotional rather than intellectual experience of the audience, but to refer to Moonana as a "puppet show" is a gross misnomer. It is clearly a contemporary attempt at a classical mode.

In retrospect, Moonana is the obvious culmination of the Tasmanian Puppet Theatre's search for a style. Over the years the theatre has tried and perfected many techniques only to discard them as facets of a new challenge. Peter insists that continual experimentation is necessary if the Puppet Theatre is to survive.

"The search and exploration for new techniques is our style," he says. "Although we lose interests at least once a year, Tasmanian audiences are still our bread-and-butter. Tasmanian has such a small population it doesn't take long to saturate the State. When this happens, the

production becomes obsolete. We have to keep trying out new ideas to keep our audience support — especially in the south."

What started as a search may end up as a Sisyphus' toil, but Peter is not discouraged. "Puppetry is the theatre of the impossible. There are no conventions that constrain the form. The sky's the limit!" The metaphysics of Peter's philosophy weigh heavily on his puppets, who have to be something of a raffish. "They have to be good writers, as well as craftsmen and manipulators. The energy of the puppet must come from the puppeteer — they are not separate, distinct entities, one pre-supposes the other, which is why, in most of our shows, both are on display. A good puppeteer is something to watch as a good puppet."

Moonana is a kaleidoscope of the techniques perfected by the Puppet Theatre over the years. "Bambino", a style Peter first attempted with *Tales of the Bushland* in 1972, had more recently with *Big Bear*, which was created and directed by Tadeusz Hlondko. Peter met Tadeusz, who is a director with the P.U.K. Theatre in Turkey, during his fellowship year, and invited him to come to Australia to work with his company. Following this, Peter duplicated the style with a production of *Arabian Nights* in 1974. Peter put his puppets behind large masks for a production of *The North Wind and the Sun* and many of his productions have used Black Theatre effects. Peter doesn't hesitate to use traditional rod puppets or marionettes if the production demands it, but he is always searching for different ways to redefine their limits. "There is always something different, something new to be learnt from the theatre."

In conversation, Peter makes no distinction between the art form of puppetry and the legitimate theatre, which is perhaps one of the reasons he has been so successful. He refuses to be trapped into defining the limits of his medium or setting up specifications for puppetry and permanently abhorring his potential search for new dimensions of the genre.



# National Theatre Awards

What  
the critics  
say:



Spencer



# N S W



Kewell



Chater



Gaden



Carr



O'Brien



Wharmston

Norman Kewell, Gordon Chater and John Gaden, who seal for the Best Actor award in New South Wales, both was for their work in National productions — Chater for his amazing one-man performance in *Signs i' Spain*; *The Election of Josephus Frothingham* and Gaden for the strident "The Head and the Heart" in the state of Theatre Australia) for a rare de facto as Helen Carr in Ron Spropper's *Presenters*.

English-born Gordon Chater is one of the best known actors in Australia. He came here to appear in a J.C. Williamson comedy, but quickly established himself as an outstanding comic artist. With his television and film work he had begun to move away from the theatre until he made his electrifying comeback as Robert O'Brien in *The Election of Josephus Frothingham*.

Ruby Rose's Best Actress award was almost certainly for her splendid performance as Blanche du Bois in Tennessee Williams' *A Streetcar Named Desire*, but it is also a tribute to the sheer consistency of her work throughout the year, with highly distinctive performances in such varied roles for the Old Tote as *Lovers in Eugene O'Neill's Mourning Becomes Electra*, *Bath in Susan Gray's Coleridge Engaged* and *Garie Pogson in Patrick White's Sirens at Sorapunga*.

John Bell and Richard Wharmston, joint winners of the Best Director award, are, together with Ian Barker, the artistic directors of the National Theatre. Bell won for his splendidly innovative production of *Much ado about Nothing*, Wharmston for his brilliant staging of *The Election of Josephus Frothingham*. Wharmston, who also directed last year's Old Tote production of *A Streetcar Named Desire*, is a lecturer of Arts from Sydney University.

John Bell has recently directed such successes as Ben Elton's *The Christmas Show*, and David Williamson's *The Kennelers* and *A Mandala of Power*. His award-winning production of *Much Ado About Nothing* also shared the 1975 National Critics Award.

Wendy Dickson won the New South Wales Designer award, her award-winning design was for *A Streetcar Named Desire* for the Old Tote.

For 24-year-old playwright Signe J. Spears the first National Professional Theatre Awards must count as a triumph. He won the Best New Talent award, while the Best New Play award went to his *The Election of Josephus Frothingham* and this was also the vehicle for the Best Actor and Best Director awards.

The National Theatre production is now on an Australia wide tour with New Zealand, Hong Kong and Japan to follow. His play is also set for production in London and New York.

Spears has been a professional writer for three years and has works include *Shall*, a historical rock show, *Africa*, a vaudeville piece about racism, and *Young Mr. Which* had its premiere at the 1973 Adelaide Festival, with a revised version staged at the National this year.



Top Pick: Jude Karing may have mixed feelings about her selection as the Actress of the Year in South Australia since she always seems to acknowledge that she is an actor not an actress. Still, she is undeniably a fine acting person, and the award category at least allows for recognition of another polished actor, Eileen Hodgkinson.

In Mr. Karing's case, the judges must have been influenced not only by her work for the South Australian Theatre Company, and recently in *And Then There Were One* at Little, but also for her leading role in the Caroline Chaw Show. This innocent and effectively propagandist piece was aimed at performance, but nonetheless one of the most capable theatrical events of the year.

Mr. Hodgkinson's award is his second in recent times. He also picked up the Critics' Circle Presentation in South Australia. Both awards are a reflection of his contribution to theatre down the years, but especially for his performance as Nathaniel in *The Last of the Know-nothings*, one of the SATC's undisputed successes of the year.

Choice of George Ogilvie as director of the year is both obvious and pleasing. He had his share of critics during his tenure as artistic director of the SATC, but what artistic director worthy of the title hasn't? His achievement from 1971, when he took over dual his departure early this year, was a solid one, not only in individual productions but in giving the company shape and style and making it solid as its own permanent home in The Playhouse.

In the winner of Mr. Karing, he might equally have qualified as actor of the year. His last actor job with the SATC was to play a clown in *The Christmas Show*. He did so with a skill that was reminiscent of Keaton. And taking of *Lovers*. — I may say that he gave Spears his first play — *Josephus Frothingham* surely takes the honours so far — but it is an excellent example of perhaps the most remarkable facet of this young playwright's talent: his capacity to understand and dramatize areas of experience one would have thought foreign to him.

Add recognition of Shaun Gorton, now, like Karing, Ogilvie and Spears, departed the local scene, for the imaginative theatricality of his sets and you have awards that are bestowed on individuals who deserve them and on a director and in South Australian theatre.



Karing



Hodgkinson



Ogilvie



Bell

# Q L D



Turner



Clemmings



MacCallum



Rutherford



Fullin



O'Neil



**Best Actress:** Pat Thomson has been awarded Best Actress and Best New Talent in Queensland. The latter award is interesting because her previous, sort of tanning, developed vocal tone, and that wonderful weathered look suggest she might have been around "when Hecuba was an actor". Not surprising that her awards were for *Enterprising Mr Sloane* and *The House of Bernolde Alva*.

**David Clemmings's** award was for the guest part in *The Mountbattens*, one of those two-and-a-half-hour-as-he-also-produced-and-directed-the-show. This is good Clemmings territory because he has a secure sense of it, a rare feeling for the delights of language, and an appreciation of the way and little French mood.

**Best Director** went to Joe MacCallum for the Queensland Theatre Company production of *The Department*. Joe is a director who looks for the power of a poem. With many actors, especially inexperienced ones, this is risky because it easily over-becomes into melodrama. When it works, however, it really flies. Drama is drama, and actors and audiences alike respond to the demands.

Another award goes to the QTC for Best Designer. James Rutherford has piled up considerable experience in the past few years with external work in opera and ballet, and his award was for general highly consistent achievement. He uses the resources of the QTC without extravagance, he presents the actors with highly workable spaces, he delights the eye of his audience, and in the body with the SGND Theatre stage, he is holding his own — no mean compliment.

# V I C

**Gail Haddock** Interestingly, the Victorian awards have been almost scooped by Australian Performing Group members, who won four out of six. The win of Mrs Gable, (Best Actor) is well deserved after a decade of remarkably skilled and consistently excellent work. Most recently he has been seen as Mark O'Neil in Hilda's *A Servant of the Apocrypha*, in the company/production in *The Milk Family Show* and in

various roles in *A Toast To Mathe*.

**Swirly Kruger** (Best Actress) has also appeared in the last two, but especially in *Mathe* in *A Toast To*. This was a virtuoso performance, combining terrific singing, her physical acting and a crackle of aging.

After that, it's fairly clear why Jack Hibbard won Best New Play, with *A Toast To Mathe*. It fulfils his strict requirements of what a popular play should be.

**Best Director:** Mark Rodger is really the most consistently interesting director in Melbourne, showing what a little imagination and support with actors can achieve. He also had a hand in the re-staging of last play like Marston's *Games of Love and Chance*, and *Archie of Penzance* (Asian).

**Best Designer** was a bit of a surprise in Carol Porter, but her work, on Hilda's *Mr Fox* and *My Tiger* was historical and quite beautiful.

In the New Talent department, Liddy Clark took the honours. Far from being a neophyte, she is an accomplished actress, as evidenced by her work in *The Fourposter*, *City Singer* and *Obsessive Behaviour* in *Small Spaces*.

# W A

**Margie Luker** Anne Nease (Best Director) is at her best in the Australian idiom. The 1976 productions included Williams's *A Whistle of Friends* and Kenna's *Daughter of St Theresa Day*, with *The Last of the Anzabrothers* probably bringing out best Nease's gift for making actors into an ensemble. Most popular success of the season was Bennett's *Madam Copier*.

**Bill Dowd** (Best Designer), works in spaces and graceful sets, and showed versatility in *A Man for All Seasons* (special), *The Gentle Hook* (prose), *Archie and Old Love* (poem) and *The Last of the Anzabrothers* (epic). Earlier successes included memorably gorgeous *Brilliant Day's* designs.

**Martin Jones** (Best New Talent) is a graduate of the Western Australian Theatre Arts Course at WAIT. Jones has made a smooth transition into professional theatre. Whereas in student production he was invariably outstanding in support roles, he now shows a flair for comedy, and was recently seen in Shaw's *Men of Stratum* at the Holborn-the-Mall.

**Best Play** was Malcolm Booth's adaptation of Kall's *The Trial*. Anzabrothers' versatile, Keith's better known as an actor (Hilda and Kruger being his outstanding roles in 1976), also as an arranger of spectacular sword-fighting in Hilda. He also adapted Orwell's *Animal Farm* for theatre.



Rodger



Clark



Porter



Rutherford



Dowd



Jones



Haddock



Nease

# The Awards

NEW SOUTH WALES

QUEENSLAND

SOUTH AUSTRALIA

VICTORIA

WESTERN AUSTRALIA

BEST ACTION	Gordon Chater John Gustin	Daniel Clendenen	Edwin Haslamman	Mina Gillies	
BEST ACTRESS	Rodriga Noma	Pat Thompson	Audie Kuring	Berlyn Kraps	
BEST DIRECTOR	John Bell Richard Wherrett	Joe MacCallum	George Ogilvie	Mark Rudge	Aaron Noonan
BEST DESIGNER	Wendy Dickson	James Rutherford	Sharon Oulton	Carol Porter	Bill Dowd
BEST NEW TALENT	Steve Spears	Pat Thompson	Steve Spears	Liddy Clarke	Martin Jones
BEST NEW PLAY	Benjamin Franklin	The Department	Young Ma	A Toast to Melba	Amoral Farm/The Trial

## Richard Wherrett

### The Playwrights' Conference

The Australian National Playwrights' Conference has I believe a twofold function, which I argued at its opening on the 15 May, and in the morning-up two weeks later.

1 To encourage new writers and new writing from established writers.  
2 To provide the means by which the profession as a whole can come together to resolve mutual problems and inspire new activity.

I believe the value of the conference to be manifestable, for three reasons.

1 The encouragement of Australian writing is the means by which we come to understand ourselves as people and as a nation. This, I expect, would not be questioned. This year, of the 15 playwrights who submitted work, eight had their plays workshopped for five days (five hours a day), with a final public reading and discussion, eight had public readings of their work, with a discussion following and a remuneration by the artistic director, and roughly 20 participated as observers standing at rehearsals and seminars, with diaries and visiting personnel always available for consultation and discussion.

At times, over the five conferences, more established authors such as Alan Seymour, Dorothy Hewett, Allen de Souza, Roger Paine and Steve J. Spears have participated as new territory.

How can the value of this be measured? The facts are that roughly a third of the plays workshopped have proceeded to

production. And there are cases where writers such as Mary Gage and Kenneth Ross, have progressed from (a) observer participation to (b) having a play workshopped to (c) having a play produced (Mary Gage's *Everyone's a General* at the Perth Playhouse, and Ken Ross's *The Smoker* at the MTC and *Slowly* at the West. More at June Street). For the rest, the profiles in the future. It is an act of faith, but I know this: at Mineral two years ago, we never knew when the next Australian play was coming forth; today we are pleased two months ahead, and the competition is real too.

The conference has undoubtedly contributed to this growth in quality. This year, options on four of the plays workshopped were taken out at the conference.

2 The seminar provides the focus for the profession as a whole to come together. There were 10 this year, one and a half hours' discussion each on all manner of issues. It is important to remember that institutions need not be made at the seminar for the seminar to prove constructive. Discussion commenced before and after the event, and the concentrated nature of conference, by which one is, as it were, captive to the situation, demands that answers be sought on the issues raised and put all such of new questions be posed.

I do not mean that to sound heavy, pretentious or academic. It is relaxed and eminently stimulating. It is sensationally as valuable an activity as the workshoping and the most difficult to articulate.

I was delighted to welcome this year Roy Lewis, Peter Gynan, Katherine Brinkley, Bob Elia, Graham McDall, John Bell, Anne Finlay, Ron Southgate, Ken Horley, Terry Clark, Arthur Dignam, Garrie Hatchinson, Mick Rudge, Tony Ingram, Hilary Lindsay, Philip Parsons, Deacon Warburton, Paul Lee, Bill Redmond, Hilary Farling, Alex

Ross, to name but a few.

I was also pleased to welcome Steve Wilson and John Osborne. It is important to realise, of the overseas guests, two things.

1 They function to provide an outside point of reference, in this case as English ones.

2 They are paid for indirectly by outside funds, not by conference funds.

It is a lottery, of course — it is impossible to determine the contribution they can make. John Osborne, I believe, was entertained in us at the first place, and arguably had no right to accept the invitation. The subsequent bad publicity I am at present here, obviously, to tell Steve Wilson, on the other hand, was generous, perceptive, open and positive, with a grain dust to offer from the English experience.

It was also a great pleasure to welcome 14 critics from across the nation for the final three days, a process by which we could encourage the concept of their being an integral part of the profession. All the more so it is that some points in understanding the conference's aims and roles. Of the 14, four only (Len Radie, Melbourne, the Age, Tally Davis, Sydney, The Sun, John Kirby, Adelaide, the *Sunday Mail* and David Marr, *National Times*) sought out either Bill Sheehy, the administrator, or myself for comment — a judgement of what this conference was about would rarely demand this. Yet, without words or discussion, Frances Kelly's "impression" in the *Australian* suggests that the conference was "worthwhile". I find this deeply satisfying.

Finally, I was delighted that the conference concluded with the inaugural presentation of the National Professional Theatre Awards. While awards in television and film proliferate confusingly, as award in the theatre by which the profession itself can vote for and acknowledge quality I believe to be uniquely worth while.

Judi Farr in *Hamlet*

**'Stimulating, tender, funny, but slightly shallow'**

#### GOING BUSINESS

BOB ELLIS

*Going Business*, Premier Theatre Downstairs, Sydney. Opened 6 May 1977. Director: Richard M. Barrett. Lighting designer: Wayne Macgregor. Text: Siripants.

Cast: Directed by Richard Bradshaw. Mr Darwin: Robert Bayle. Mrs Darwin: Judi Farr. Charlie Newman: (Monica) Judy, Howard.

*The Coroner's Report* by John Summers. Intro: Judi Farr. *The Man, Right Center!*

*The Flow* by Neil Pomeroy. *The Wife*, Judi Farr. *The Husband*, Ralph Cottrill. *The Visitor*, Robert Ellis.

*Going Business*, an entertaining, sleek and, on the whole, worthy evening of short plays intelligently staged by Richard Bradshaw at the Premier Theatre Downstairs. In a brief short, I think, of being a formidable occasion. Each writer showed a lot of promise and the audience had a whole of a sense, but the overall effect was warmly forgivable.

Not, of course, that you can do that much in the absence of a brilliant idea, with these or four actors, no set and 15 minutes of time. Richard Bradshaw did a good deal with music and money men as *Business*, a semi-allegorical extended revue sketch about a dim suburban couple whose unkempt, bearded son proposes to marry a gorilla, and keeps her around for an evening meal of business, plus farcious misadventure and pining at the audience in order to make her less nervous, the parents

put on monkey masks, and the evening theatrical effect of this, which would go down quite well in deepest Poland, together with one of the dialogues about the probable substance of the gorilla's children, and the dawning, endearing effect of the small space, elevated it for minutes on end into something more valued than its next frequent foe, that of a Paul Hogan sketch. The performances were good, in particular Stephen Thomas as the income, chaotic, degenerate son. The audience booed with laughter, but a stunned but heavily restrained at the night club song in *Calvary* about marrying a gorilla ("If you could see her through my eyes, / She wouldn't be Jewish at all") for me to applaud its originality.

The second play, *The Coroner's Report* by John Summers, was rather more original and surprising, not so much in conception (it takes place in one of those bleak, posthumous interstices in the Great Void), but in the tenderness of the characterisation of the central personage, a worn-out, weary virgin speaker making the long voyage of her dreamful tragedy, from self-interest to self-sacrifice, that brought her to this dull quietude. Judi Farr's extraordinary performance was full of that sort of sacramental sacramental glow which rarely if at all find further from the women of a former generation. The poignant inquirer of the ghostly interrogation seemed in the face of this audience downright pertinent.

The most successful play (because it's apparently funny) is *The Flow* by Neil Pomeroy. It deals with the fantasy world one which a vulgar workmanlike witness upon being fired from his job in his fantasy world, he is appointed chairman of the board over a Rolle-Rayon, has a beautiful wife, a elegantly cocked, and falls into a suicidal despair. The theatrical styles vary wildly and the best, a Noel Coward adultery triangle, goes from both David and Ralph Cottrill some of the wildest performances I've seen in this style-strewn country. Cottrill, in particular, especially in his recurring raked attacks on the furniture, being the carpet, smashing the chairs, throwing up and swallowing unwellcome telegrams, and at one point leaving the theatre altogether and ending around in the parking lot outside, displayed that sort of disciplined brash courage that is usually seen in only the most farcical and emboldened actors.

On the whole, a good and stimulating, tender and funny, but slightly shallow evening, well worth having seen and a great boon no doubt to three potentially worthwhile writers.

# 'The play served the purpose of confirming attitudes for a partisan audience'

## THE CAKE MAN

REX CRAMPTON

*The Cake Man* by Robert J. Mervin, Presented by the Aboriginal Arts Board of the Australia Council in association with Robert Mervin and Brian Syron. Bands Theatre, Adelaide, N.S.W. Opened 20 April 1977. Director: George Upton, designer: Wendy Dickson. Music composed by William Turner. Film sequence directed by Gillian Armstrong. Lighting design: Simon Jenkins. Production manager, Christine Brown. Station: Ruby, Jocelyn Saunders. Non-Participating: Teddy Phillips, Steve Burnett. Father: Stuart Neilson, Brian Syron. Priest: Mervyn George Mervin, Sydney, Unconvinced. Robert Faggner. Christian: Max Cullen.

When I went to see *The Cake Man* I had not read the play, but I had high expectations related to the director (George Upton), the designer (Wendy Dickson), and the cast (which included Brian Syron and Max Cullen). I know that the play had originally been workshoped at the Black Theatre Arts Centre, was about black Australians and had been written by me. I probably, without having formulated the idea, suspected something fairly startling and tough in the area of personal and social injustice (like Louis Jones's *Blackness*, say). The reasons for the partial disappointment of these expectations are hard to disentangle and are not all related in a direct way to those responsible for the production (in an attempt to disentangle these and, simultaneously, to cast some light on the incidental factors which can contribute to one's attitude to a production, I had better take things in chronological order on the evening in question).

First of all, before even approaching the theatre, there's the problem of the expectations. They are unconsidered and illogical. Must this play, because it is something of a first (certainly in my experience), since the whole was against societal injustice to black people in Australia? Must it be exposed in the strict (emotional) metaphor that I somehow expect? Must it look revolutionary, provide answers? Such presuppositions are manifestly unfair, but they are, nevertheless, part of the unconscious attitude I bring with me.

Then, still before the play begins, there's the experience of the other members of the audience and the audience. For some reason I always find the Bands Theatre slightly depressing and the flat

that audience who assemble will only total about 40 males or even more so. I am, in my usual wondering why I don't like watching the rest of the audience (lingering and obviously waiting they could enter from the back of the auditorium, not the front). The small thrust stage seems to have been raised since I saw it last, but it still seems to have nothing to thrust from, being locked up against a dead wall which gives no feeling of back-stage depths and possibilities. As a thrust space it gives me a feeling of cardboard-theatre and school-hall make-believe. Sitting in the audience makes me feel part of a mocky distant society — like Christmas in paper Rafters, perhaps.

Retreating into the programme, I am told that, "With his childhood experience of Mission life, Robert has written a powerful and dramatic message that should be seen by all Australians, black and white. Through the skilful writing Robert has not allowed the strong sociological message of his play to be overwhelmed by dramatic values." I find myself speculating on the people who have found their way to this theatre to see this play and guessing that most of them are ready to be suckled between the eyes by the sociological message and stand as an end of reassurance about literary merit.

The play begins with a short prologue in which an archetypal aboriginal family unit (father, mother, son) is isolated by an equally abstract group of white men (pilot, soldier, civilian). Let me get it clear that, ultimately, I thought Brian Syron gave a fine performance as Sweet William, but his initial appearance, looking not in all like a hunter in bushbush and body make-up, throwing his gamine down behind as "sweetest" rock, did nothing for me, in the way of getting the evening off to a convincing start. What do I mean by convincing? Well, Brian Syron, clothed and as the character of Sweet William, talking directly to the audience, is convincing and so are the film segments at the end of the play. I guess you could make the case of argument that's intended here convincing on film. The images and figures of the great soldier, and civilian, however, appear in super-theatrical style subsequent from rear-projection is abruptly transformed into the real figures by the removal of a small screen. The screen probably set on its track. In this theatre I feel too close to overlook such details, yet not close enough to forgive them. But once the whole nature of the space seems to assist anything in the way of a theatrical coup, it is something of a triumph for director and designer to have brought it off at all.

Let's be dead, the archetypal father has a series of clothing throws to him. With some postulation he puts them on, transforming to the Sweet William of the subsequent plot-line. The success, which might have been a fully developed savage-discovering-mission — and — working-out-how-to-mis-interpreters feature, is treated with somewhat anxious-worring haste — the postulation is only a guess — giving the impression of a certain lack of faith in

Western del Perro Nazionale della Colina 1972

Una produzione di John Bell

# MOLTO RUMORE

Per Nulla  
di Guglielmo Shakespeare

«Vento a crepe pelle e splendida testa»

Donato Finiguet

«Fondamentale come!»

Donato Finiguet

«Spiega, intelligente, esuberante, empatico, esuberante, esuberante»

Donato Finiguet

Sebbene il Gruppo

a parole cinque settimane

# nimrod upstairs

Telefono del botteghino 66 5008

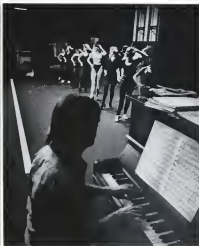
RECITATO IN INGLESE

the idea. It is, after all, only a translation that there is something unsatisfactory about the conception.

Sweet William is a preposterous, drunken, down-and-out black in Sydney. In a long monologue of jokes ("my emotion of an aboriginal crow black, black, black...") I, phonetically illegitimate actor ("how the area last is wing"), and rhetorical questions ("what do you want from me?") Sweet William comes across as a good blend of nature-like observation and natural wit, intelligence, and charm. Brian Syron does this extremely well in a voice that manages to sound tight and maintain clarity — a difficult feat of vocal accommodation which is only matched by the skill of the writer in doing the same thing. He then proceeds to transition us with a flashback account of how he came to Sydney. A small set is assembled by black-clad stage hands. At this point I began to register that the play is presented in almost as many styles as there are scenes. I wondered if this had always been the author's intention, or whether it was the result of workshoping, the choice of the director, or merely generally explication. The set represents the kitchen of the slum in which William and Ruby and their two children live (as Cullen, I think). The scene that immediately follows is drinking as a symptom of human alien, dehumanisation, and cultural deprivation, but faith in him and his remaining dependence on the Bible, the son's lack of respect for his father, the poverty-stricken wisdom of the younger child. All this is conveyed in the realistic imitation of mainstream Australian drama, but thematic connections with the rather abstract section like "gill" of Christianity, the father/son relationship (a theme close to when a verbal canon, the picture has been of).







And comes the question: just how much is deliberately put on for the performance, how much for what it calls for: do certain cast members fall short? An impossible job to convince the audience that the right dancers have been finally selected — or is the director's judgement to be shown up, and that is all part of the play? On opening night I certainly did not agree with the director's final talent line-up, not on the performances given. The tension lies the danger of producing a show like this: can all members of the cast maintain their performances to the exact degree required? Perhaps that is why many who saw the show overseas maintained it could never be properly staged in Australia.

Miraculously, it does hold together in Australia, and, with perhaps a few tiny reservations, I can go along with most of the superlatives which have been passed on the musical. In my opinion, though, some of the performances are somewhat muted by histrionic abilities not quite on a par with dancing and singing.

To me it is a meeting show, honest a somewhat compromised one. With its high-powered dance numbers, possible vocal, superb lighting and sound-engineer effects, it is all calculated to hypnotize. Occasionally it is ugly, particularly around the

middle, which an interval might have softened. There are, too, some rather subsidiary moments — which would obviously have greater appeal in America — that could have been deleted or maybe condensed with advantage for the Australian production. I particularly refer to the segments involving the homosexual, Paul.

The final scene, where the 17 auditions, plus the director and his assistant Larry, dance twirlily around the stage in ghastly costumes, as opposed to their hedonistic rehearsal clothes, is stunning, but appears to have little relation to the act on which has gone before, except to provide a curtain call. Had it been the right finale selected and supposedly showing them at a later date in actual performance, it would have been understandable. It does, however, make a definite high-level lull in the show, so one cannot easily object. But for a musical which otherwise is so realistic...

Just as *Hair* and *Jesus Christ Superstar* have spawned what are now some of Australia's leading talents, so a few years hence some of our leading performers will trace the way-points in their careers back to *A Chorus Line*. Of that, I have no doubt.

With few exceptions, the cast possesses a very high level of talent indeed, but there

are two whom I would place above all others: One is Scott Pearson, who plays the director Zach, the puppet-master whose voice and personality dominates throughout. The other is Pamela Gibbons who has demonstrated before — notably in *Jump Jolies* in *Yu Yu*, *Alvin* and *Ernie* (to me she and Noel Ferrer were the only good things about that atrocious musical) — that she has just potential as the hard-boiled shrew. Now Gibbons can take her rightful place right beside Davis and Peryman.

It is certainly going to be a tough job for the cast to keep up the standard of performance. And apart from those on stage, one must also pay tribute to the backstage workers, who ensure that everything is working to perfection. Not easy, one assumes, for such a show.

Yes, despite my qualms, I really did enjoy *A Chorus Line*. It is obviously a great musical and can be heartily recommended to all and sundry. I can't wait for an opportunity to view it again.

*A Chorus Line* could well follow the procedure set by *M. J. Fox Lady* and *Godspell* with the formation of a second company. Perhaps more importantly how is it going to affect the future of other musicals in Australia? After this show, it will be doubly difficult to promote others. What could possibly top it?

**'Is this . . . part of some diabolical plot to prove that . . . Australian plays really are bloody awful?'**

#### UNSPRINKABLE ACTS

DOROTHY HEWITT

*Unsprinkable Acts* by Kella Free. Old Tote Theatre Company, Parade Theatre, Kensington, NSW. Opened 1 June 1977. Director, Peter Collingwood; designer, Kella Free; music composed by John Ross.

*The Chronicle*: Deborah, Colin, Don, Frances, Paul, Jim, Eric, Hendrick, Wanda, Ned, Meg, Gillian, Stephen, Robinson, Philip, Betty, Shane, Patricia, Dr. Rogers, Bob, Myra, Catherine, William, Michael, Brian, Mary, Claude, Shane, Patricia, Logan, Ken, Hendrick.

How is it even possible to take *Unsprinkable Acts* at the Tote seriously, or to write about these two crude plays misquoting in the Parade as theatre?

It is the Tote's final death blow to the Australian play, part of some diabolical plot to prove that they were right, all the time, and Australian plays really are bloody awful? It kept reminding me of the MTC "inhumanly obscure voices" at Great Street last year, an experience which appeared to be "designed to fail".



And yet it was only too apparent that all was on the up-and-up, and the Tote really did think this was the best they could offer the patron (and this at a time when Richard Wherrett of the Norrad has gone on record as saying that the building of good Australian plays means the Norrad can no longer hope to cope with production).

With mounting doubt, I read the programme notes and heard how director Peter Collingwood had written a very nice letter to Colin Free, saying, "I don't suppose you're writing for theatre these days?" It was not of 1974 but never once happened in La Maestra, the Frim and the old Norrad, let alone the 18 years since that first great flowering. Oh dear old Tote! Where have you been all the days of our lives? And what a funny old expensive barbershop hobby you turned out to be!

Anyway, as the story goes, Colin Free released and rewrote two radio plays, changed the writer round a bit, and, boy presto, the Tote had another taken Aussie season. How it does take one back!

Remember the old Australian play seasons when the audience turned up dutifully to take their medicine once or twice a year, and it was all paid for by the Commonwealth Foundation?

*Dr Brown's Body*, a kind of cracking science-fiction melodrama, was the first of the double bill. It was about a technical virgin called Maya and a technical stud called Chuck who once made love in the ruined quarters at Tarwe Springs, a top-secret U.S. installation base harnessing solar energy, now wrapped in 15 acres of plastic.

Chuck, supposedly dead, turns up as an invisible headless man. When Purnomo does his best under the gases and the steroids, and then a little, as the scientific Swedish man to assist the character with minor prostheses, swapping black-glove ritual acts with Chuck (Surely this couldn't mean anything as obvious as a cover-up to rescue Colin Free says the play draws on "a long-cherished interest in Surrealism and Pop Art, and takes inspiration from Christy's earth-wrapped souls too").

"After that I need a good stiff whisky," said the man beside me.

"Reflexes are better," said the man in the seat behind.

Luckily the audience fled back after interval for *The Unhappy Occurrence*. It wasn't. It was marginally better than *Dr Brown's Body*, all those good actors doing their socks off, Reg Gilla, with a Pyramion director's hug, using every trick of an old pro to reveal Winkler as the ex-porno-writer-films-on-one-days, with some kind of wild, naive life, and Redmond Phillips giving the stock director Judge a Dickinson kind of energy.

But, swamped with "literary phrases", word-play, and clumsy alliteration, it was all such miserably old-fashioned, messy, late-middle-aged stuff — "Glossa bore for a mystery behind the strands".

How we longed for a Hubbard, a Shaw

or a Ramsay!

Glory for a pleasant Saturday arvo on Anytime ABC, I had a friend.

But then of course that is not what the theatre is all about, and the ultimate alibi is to think it is.

## Engrossing shows for the young and very young

### PUPPETS AND PANTOMIMES

#### ALLISON JONES

*After May* combination of glass puppet shadow puppets, marionettes and black shadow, devised and directed by Peter Halls. The Puppet House, Recording Hall, Open House, Sydney.

*Deer Head Island* (the marionettes) devised, directed and performed by The Puppetarium (David and Sue Salbitt) Martin Street Theatre, Sydney.

*Lavin Red Riding Hood* (pantomime), devised and directed by Peter Williams. St James Playhouse, Sydney.

*Twelve Wind* (marionettes, Marjorie Lloyd, Michele Chappell, Peter Williams, Virginia Parnham).

*On a Yarnell* Pantomime, devised by Jack Mannix. PACT Co-operative, St Andrew's Church House, Sydney.

Puppets and pantomimes — two entirely different styles of puppet shows, both engrossing. *After May* relies on static and movement, with an use of the spoken word. The pantomime tells us all the more is that of *Head* (the German name in the dramatic Wilhelm orchestra) using only strong and percussion) and the "story" in about form, very large ones manipulated in black theatre.

The events in the life of the two are an extremely varied and dramatic actor gathering interrupted by a fierce storm, a light appears, a praying reaches this approach suggested by the use of a shadow puppet, the birth of a new queen and a battle between the two queens leading to the happy departure of the old one. The movements of the puppets are expressive and the action is well matched to the changing moods of the music to convey a wide range of emotions.

One of the dangers of puppet shows is a tendency to a running story-line and a misuse of dialogue. *After May* avoids these pitfalls by eschewing words and relying on pure visual images, backed by music. Purnomo finds words there by using a known story and having most of its dialogue already provided, the same technique used by The Puppetarium in their previous show, *The Trachea Ring*.

The choice of an existing story for a puppet play does not by any means imply that the puppeteers are taking the easy way out. A lot of proving, selecting and arranging has obviously taken place, and the result is a successful adaptation of a difficult story. Exceptions might be taken to some of the elements chosen, but the main thing is that the story line is kept clear and

simple.

Particularly good was the way the conventions of children's theatre were used to further the understanding of the story and not as distracting interpretations. The hand puppets here of addressing their audience, combined with the encouragement of audience participation, made it easy to bridge difficult gaps in the narrative and emphasise possible obvious points and so make sure that even the very young got something out of the story. The two puppeteers provided a convincing range of 15 voices for their marionettes and all the characters were distinctive and memorable.

Both of these shows could be enjoyed by older children and even adults, but *Lavin Red Riding Hood* is obviously directed at the very young child, simple and lively. The basic fairy story is a good one for pantomime use, as both the dame (grandma) as being gloves and red shoes to go with her ugly story and the miller are built in. In this role Peter Williams made a really master wall, with a touch of self-satisfaction in his long-winded, American-scented posturing.

Well-known songs were fitted into the scenario, either straight or adapted — "Herrmann's Hinkaway" made a good stinky signature-piece for the wolf. Some of the funny business fitted in well with the action, too, as when the wolf's knocking at the door turned into a conversation "knock-knock" and wolf then asked the audience what grandma.

PACT's "do-it-yourself" pantomime" was something else again. It can't really be considered as a spectator sport, as the adults are regarded mainly as the means of getting the children to the site (though some pleasure can be gained by watching your little ones cooing around seeing "horror" heads or combining to form dancing seven-legged spiders). The whole idea of the exercise is child involvement, both as a casual basis and a semi-permanent one, as all are welcome. The permanent one is all used in 20, most will at school.

The basic structure, useful as there is one, involves a set of solid started characters as much of a pantomime, with the audience putting in all over the place (all in together on the same base floor) singing, marching, galloping, holding up an "instant inflatable plastic behind all which changed into an "instant inflatable plastic again", which they then fall upon and killed — all directed by a fairy with a whistle, a useful prop in the current age. Long for adult spectators, but obviously happily enjoyed by the participating children.

It would be interesting to know how much open-off there is from all this child entertainment, whether it all goes any further than the actual performance. Certainly, in our household, it is even normally a bedtime of do-it-yourself drama, open and puppetry, then holding pantomimes have provoked a flurry of instant pantomime with recognizable elements from all productions, as well as destructively original ideas.

## T



From a theatrical point of view, a fine production — but . . .

COUNT DRACULA

KARL HUBERT

*Count Dracula* by Ted Tiller (Tasmania Theatre Company, Theatre Royal, Hobart) opened 19 April 1977. Director, John Lawrence. Designer, Ray Bryant. Count Dracula, Baron Harkerline, Miss Murray, Clara Williams, Jonathan Harker, Harry Swann, Professor Helsing, Rumanol Duparc, Sybil Swann, Hazel Harker, with Vito (Johnny), Ross (Shelington), Peter (Parker), and Dolly.

One of the intangibles a theatre company must take into account when selecting a play for production is audience taste or rather the change it may be undergoing. It may be found that the most careful analysis fails to show up changes.

An example is the recent production by the Tasmanian Theatre Company of Ted

Tiller's *Count Dracula*. The play was first performed in a former Raymond Duparc in Professor Van Helsing. Given Hamilton as Count Dracula.

Tiller's *Count Dracula*

*Dracula* was intended as an exercise in audience-building. It was intended to attract, in particular, young people who, nourished by often questionable television fare, would want to see spectacular theatre with a dash of horror.

It did not quite work out as planned, and this apparently for two reasons. The "enlightened" young generation does not believe in vampires, while regular theatregoers in Tasmania apparently prefer to see more conventional fare (for instance, a good thriller by Agatha Christie).

It cannot be ruled out that another little could have made some difference. Counts from the region beyond Hungary have lost their appeal, their use as contemporary theatre could, at best, be that of characters to be ridiculed.

And there was evidence that the younger members of the audience saw *Dracula* in this light. To them he was a figure of fun, a third-rate comic.

From the purely theatrical point of view



"You are falling asleep. Deeper and deeper to sleep." Robert Gump and Clara Williams

*Dracula* was a fine production. Theatrically, it is a difficult piece to stage, with as many features and costume frontiers and its magic tricks.

It must have been quite difficult to engage an actor who also is an accomplished magician. Producer John Unwin brought in Robert Gump Hamilton, and the choice was an excellent one (Hall may through the Hobart season, Mr Hamilton became quite ill, but kept going with the help of assistants).

Clara Williams played Mina, and she proved another good choice. She was equally convincing as the new victim of *Dracula*, the fiancée of Jonathan (Harry Scott), and as one who comes close to being a vampire. Here, the moved provocatively, almost indelicately, a moment later she was the fearful Mina.

Mr Hamilton played *Dracula* as big as the mythical dragon and when he looked blood, he did so with gusto, producing noises which resembled those made by a *Chassis* of the old school "drinking" the shark's soup.

Raymond Duparc, as Harkerline was Helsing brought a touch of humor into the sombre atmosphere and his acting assured audiences that justice would prevail in the end.

Sue Rattall's set worked. It was of subdued elegance and provided a sense of space, much more, in fact than is available on the stage of the venerable Theatre Royal.



Joanne Whalley-Kilmer, Margaret de Maistre

## The transfer to an Australian setting 'was only a transfer in name'

### THREE SISTERS

RUGER FULVERS

*Three Sisters* by Anton Chekhov, adapted by Ross McKelvey and Ralph Goldstein. Canberra Repertory Theatre at Theatre Three, Canberra. Opened 22 May 1977. Director: Ross McKelvey. Set Designer: Russell Bates. Cost and design: Margaret Newman. Light design: Shirley Mudge. Cast: Margaret de Maistre, Martha, Janet Macfarlane, Irina, Joanne Whalley-Kilmer, Froussa, Warwick Oatley, Dr Chumakov, Michael Nelson, Vladimir, Robert, Sam Farrow, Captain Selzer, John Hargreaves, Teddy, John Brian O'Brien, Maria, Bernadette, Vincent, Ann, Sofia, Helen, Irina, Phil Macfarlane, Froussky, John Hargreaves, Robert, Robert, Gordon, Michael, Mandy Brown, Nancy, Jane Rose, Chumakov, a Doctor, Bill Munn, Derek, Norman. Sub-plot people: Megan Donnelly, John Mackay.

It is a bold and interesting move to transfer a play, and the old joke that a play is never a happy one just optical aid has. There are all sorts of reasons for moving a play geographically, most of them to do

with audience familiarity in content and context. I do not agree with the Rep's propaganda, however, that "the universality of Chekhov's observations of the human condition in *Three Sisters* has often been obscured by the play's specifically Russian setting" (understand detail hardly ever obscures universality. If anything, it reminds us that people in different places, despite cultural barriers, are really just like us).

But the transfer was only a transfer in name. It should have been done more radically, more wholly, not just by changing names, references to objects and incidents. The more social content of the play has to make sense if it is going to work in Australia as an Australian play. This didn't happen in the Canberra Rep production. The soldiers of *Three Sisters* are of that unique Russian stock, "the superfluous man". For decades the military had been the repository of poets, poets-dramatists, and fulfilled philosophers. Taken to the bush, their intellectualism and Byronic longing appeared wholly foreign. If you are going to do this, then you must alter the script to fit the local context, or not do it at all. And the situation of the cast that is so important to the play and to 19th-century Russian just wasn't presented here to the conventional. It was conspicuously wrong in the production.

While in parts the play struck a mo-

lignant rhythm that is necessary in any production of Chekhov, there arose a glaring problem in the conception — or non-conception — of naturalism here. The set was one of those sprawling extravaganzas that place detail beside indications detail without taking into account workability. Most of the latter half of the play, for instance, was played far to one side. At times this meant that the people on the other side couldn't see. At best it was a stiff neck.

The biggest problem with an ultra-realistic set of unique decor like this one is the acting style it imposes on actors. They tend to pose and overstyle in that special kind of "stage realism" that is not only foreign to most in life. This worked against Chekhov, whose aim it was to wrench the overly laid neuroticism from drama.

Strangely, in this production, the women didn't manage to establish themselves at any depth. This is sad, because the plan is really a psychological portrait of them. Joanne Whalley-Kilmer (Irina), however, did manage to convey that special irony and sadness that is in the character and in those Russian heroines of that age. The other two sisters were too much like a stage personality. That, I feel, is the fault of the director for not establishing them as separate and different from the beginning. In the end one of the sisters, Janet Macfarlane, rode on a wave of melodrama until, on the climax, she passed stiffly in the "weeping position", and all the nobility went down the drain.

The men were good, although there there the balance of the piece altogether. Ralph Goldstein, a wonderful nervous cynic who might fly off the handle like at any moment, Warwick Oatley, failing to speak more by name, Brian O'Brien, the teacher, warm quiet and funny, and Steve Page — all absolutely created that unique generation of misunderstood, alone, isolated amidst provincial ignorance, obscurity with grand ambitions and wild passions. And this despite the fact that, as portrayed, they really didn't make sense by then in Queensland. It is a tribute to actors and director.

The production struck the right tone at moments, but in general had an unimpressive conventionalism about it. Where the mood should have been quiet, remote frustration, there was often flatness. When some of the portrayals were lacking with life, when, especially two of the women, were two-dimensional. And the melodrama at the end worked against Chekhov's gift of leaving us hanging in mid-air with nothing resolved or a mood. The men were strong though. As if the play were in fact *Three Soldiers*.

# 'There is irony in the play . . . there is also a bitter anger and ugliness'

## AMPUTATION

KATHARINE BRISLAND

*Amputation* by Jens Bjørnboe. Translated by Susan Hesse. Australian National University Press, Canberra. Opened 10 May 1977. Director: Roger Pulver.

Supreme Court surgeon Prof. Forthofsen, Ken Gardiner, Nurse Luciana, Marguerite Wulfski, Gary Prechtel, Male Nurse Adolf, Harry Schmidt, Patient A, Morris Forthofsen, Malcom Sullivan, Patient B, Medical Student, Martin McDermid.

Roger Pulver in Canberra seems to have set out on a one-man crusade to raise the consciousness of theatre people and theatre-going audiences to the work of some of the compelling minds in the contemporary theatre of which we are at present deprived by the language barrier.

A linguist, playwright and novelist, by one of those unlikely accidents of fate Pulver's special areas of interest in language and literature are Japanese, Polish and Norwegian. His own writing is oddly influenced as both by the three cultures and his own native America. An example is his early play *Kamashiki*, chosen for workshoping at the recent Australian National Playwrights' Conference in Canberra in detail by analogy with Japanese involvement in the Second

World War.

For a national translation conference held in Canberra during May, Pulver introduced to Australian audiences at the Arts Centre, the work of a stark Norwegian writer, Jens Bjørnboe. It is translated into English, easily flowing English by Susan Hesse. Bjørnboe died by his own hand last year. To judge from the 'local' descriptions available to us of the recurrent theme of social injustice in his work, the anger that informs it and the way he seems to use images of physical violence to demonstrate degradations upon the spiritual nature of man, one gets the picture of a sensitive, Stein-like poet with a deep anger against the new and greater injustices that have arisen since the time of the great Norwegian dramatist.

A glimpse of the gentleness of Bjørnboe, his past's pain at the small accidents of nature, his humour and irony, was given at the beginning of the programme with a selection of poems from his collection, *Notes, Wind and Earth*. A handful of lyrical poems on the natural world is mixed with ironic statements about the good person life does a man, a sensitive-verse national anthem and a ballad of the North Sea in which a family, faced with the disaster of Father dying at sea, resolves the situation by poisoning him in a burning barrel for the rest of the voyage. Too late they discover that the barrel, stumped with the firm's surgeon, has been sold along with the rest of the congregation. Sadly they conduct a funeral service over 60 miles of tarring, while on the other side of the world a Hindu is executed for the mysterious murder of a man in a burning barrel.

This latter painful work is an introduction to his play *Amputation*, which occupies the rest of the evening. There is irony in the play, and grotesquerie: there is also a bitter anger and ugliness.

*Amputation* is a satire; the setting is an operating theatre and we are introduced first to Nurse Luciana, who explains the privilege in more far so. This is to note and observe at work the distinguished outpocketed Supreme Professor Forthofsen, Neurosurgeon Wulfski, and Supreme Court Surgeon Professor Forthofsen. Their job, we discover, is to "normalise" any unfathomable individuality which may be making untidy the ideal well-ordered society; and they demonstrate their "psycho-surgical" method, which is the play consists of sections and knees in the groin, and finally sections and amputations. Such is Bjørnboe's view of social democratic political and political systems.

A fine example of that ideal "normal" is Patient A, Adolf, who is put through a process of self-demonstration and shame until he becomes the mouthpiece of his interrogator. Sister Luciana re-emphasises her ecclesiasticism of freedom when she and her lover discovered the erotic excitement of whispering subversive slogans to each other at the act of love. Bjørnboe's State, however, does believe (unlike Freud) that it has a place in the bedrooms of the nation and Luciana and her lover are

arrested and their confession is

Bjørnboe's anger is apparent, but it has the great dramatic saving grace of wit. His points are simple — how the enforcement of majority opinion is the corruption of the individual and how such enforcement can only be made through fear — and he makes them with the Brechtian method of repetition.

The telling central scene is a moving contrast between two surgical teachers who meet briefly in friendship. Their day exchanges are finally interrupted by her patients who demonstrate their own political and cosmological. The scene is conducted by the same rules as the surgeons' interrogation of Adolf. In both the betrayal of language is complete.

Roger Pulver has a good team of Canberra actors with which to realise the play. Ken Gardiner and Gary Prechtel play the distinctive surgeons, Marguerite Wulfski, a most comical actress, plays Nurse Luciana, Harry Schmidt a defeated Adolf and Malcolm Sullivan and Marcello Offiano the teaching pair of surgeons.

The production is smooth and fluid. I would, however, question Pulver's decision to raise the grotesque brutality of the original script, as he does by them, as the materials of our own surviving individualism. He claims that looks in the groin, buckets of blood and severed limbs underneath the operating-table and circular saws in the hands of the surgeons, we would find comic, ineffective and in poor taste. And I am sure we would, as we would find good reason in poor taste and second life.

It seems to me, however, that it is the purpose of this angry playwright to offend our taste, to trick us into laughing at horror, only to turn such as the implications of our own reaction. In this he has much in common with the post-war generation of German and Eastern European writers, directors, poets and painters, who have attempted through horror and sensation to confront us with that consuming path which was Europe's legacy from the Second World War.

Jens Bjørnboe's own life and death seem to bear witness to the artist's responsibility for that legacy. An excerpt from his novel *War With Love* America, quoted in the *Amputation* programme, is evidence of that view.

"This is the world that today that politics have no relation to what is human. The truth is that all our culture, all of European culture, is created by criminals, drunks, epileptics, the mentally ill, epileptics, insane addicts, homosexuals, or as any race suffers from subnormality. It is not the so-called healthy forces that create a culture. It is not the doctors and the great teachers who create a culture. Moreover, in most cases, the 'illness' is healthier than the usual, robust healthiness."

"Just as life itself, culture demands a speech of nihilism and at least a minimum of nihilism in order to emerge just as reproduction demands a tiny bit of autoecy in order to continue . . ."

Isn't it the truth?



Ken Gardiner, Gary Prechtel

Playscript

# THE FALL GUY

Linda Aronson



## Act Two

for *I of The Fall* was appeared in the first issue of *Playboy* Australia. In Act 1 Hughes and Helen, a homosexual couple, meet Jack, by chance in a pub Jack has for 11 years pursued Gordon as a cat-in-the-hat, but the partnership has broken up. Jack (in Gordon's presence) explains that Hughes should become his new partner and Hughes accepts.

### SCENE I

#### Jack's flat

Jack, relaxed, is reclining on a sofa with the radio on a low stand above unswitched glasses and a full bottle of whisky as a newspaper bag, a half-empty whisky bottle and a glass of whisky stand on the rug next to Jack's armchair.

Jack: "Ladies and gentlemen, Jack Harvey, the one-armed bandit." No "Ladies and gentlemen, presenting the one-armed bandit, your very own JACE HARVEY AND FRIENDS."

Jack goes into a buttock-wiggling dance routine, twirling his left arm expectorally. The effect is far from comic. Singing softly:

"All the nice boys love a sailor, All the nice boys love a tar. All the nice boys love a sailor, Well you know what sailors are!" (Sings laughing into his chair.) "Aw dear! Jump to his feet and sing the sea love you different dance routine. Sing, singing." "Good evening, ladies and gentlemen." No "Good evening, boys and girls. My name's Duncan, but you can call me Danny. This is my friend Coal. And this is Coal, my very best friend."

Sings with anticipation. Sit down, relaxes a little. *Johnnie thought* Singing: "Oo, but I love sailors, don't you? All those bell-bottoms! Nothing like a bell-bottom, a thump!"

Sit trying to think of another joke. Bell bottoms. h-l-b-t-t-o-m-s.

Genuinely. No. Bell-bottoms? Tail-coats? No. Bell-bottoms, lemons, popples? (Pause.) Nelson? Nelson? (Laughs up.) "Ooo yes, I've been wrecked on sailors since I was this high. That's what happened to my arm. I used to pray every night, I know! Please God, make me like Nelson!"

Jack laughing into his chair. "Aw dear! That's life in the old buggery pot

(Stands up.) "Ladies and gentlemen, presenting."

The doorbell rings. Jack's face lights up and he runs towards the doorway.

Good as you? (Looks out. Offstage.) Come in! Come in! (Jack enters in an uncomfortable way.) Where's Hughes?

Sean, Jack, about how much I think I should explain. Hughes, well Hughes.

Jack, *impatiently*, showing Sean and nodding towards the wrapped bottle.

Jack: Ay, look what I got him! (Rushes to the table, pulls the bottle out of its paper bag.) Eight years old. Touch you buggers to drink me out of house and home. Aw, there's gotta be some fish here tonight! Wanna drink? No, better wait for Hughes. You can have a shot of the other stuff.

Sean: No thanks.

Jack: What's the matter? Hangover?

Come on, here's the bag.

Sean (unwillingly): All right.

Jack: Now I could wait your stuff!

Jack removes his glass and the opened whisky bottle. Sean and two drinks.

Sean: Just a small one thanks. I'm

(Lying.) I haven't eaten today. Or

no headache when I haven't eaten.

Jack: Bullshit! Do y the world a good

bye, Ozzie!

Sean: Cheers.

Jack: Tell y'what, I'll make you a sandwich. Woulda bought some grub if I'd thought of it.

Sean: No thanks, a drink's enough.

Jack: How about fish and chips? I'll go up the street. Haven't had a meal myself today.

Sean: Thanks, but Jack, I want to talk to you.

Jack: Plenty of time for talking when Hughes gets here. Now sit down, put your feet up and have your drink. Now whisky wasn't what you lots of fish? What about Hughes? What'll he have? (The doorbell rings.) There he is the buggery! (Opens the offstage curtain.) Well! You'd better come in. (Gordon enters followed by a newspaper.) Jack: Aw, incidentally, I hope I didn't ruin your beauty sleep last night.

Gordon: No, you didn't.

Jack: Well, that's a relief! Old Myles and you were worn out. You met Sean, didn't y'?

Just getting together to sort out the set.

Gordon (already): Ah, yeah.

Jack: Yeah.

Gordon (pouring the full whisky bottle): Good whisky. Doing yourself proud. Who bought this, you or him?

Jack: I did — to celebrate the new set, materialisation. (Looks up for some fish and chips.) I guess you don't see that sort of thing these days.

Gordon: I'm not hungry, thanks.

Jack: Well, I'm glad to hear it. (Goes away emphatically at Gordon. Pause. To Sean.) Help yourself to the prog. Plenty more where that came from.

Jack goes out. Pause.

Gordon (quietly): All right son. What's the game?

Sean: I look. I'm on your side. I'm not involved with this.

Pause.

Gordon: He thinks you're his darkness, you know that.

Sean: I know.

Pause.

Gordon: Where's your mate?

Sean: I think I haven't seen him since we were here last night.

Gordon (quietly): Aw, yeah? He odd, I reckon. Far bigger like you.

Pause. They confront each other.

Sean: You know, but then I don't see that's any of your business.

Gordon: I don't care about your sex-life, mate. But if you're seeing up Jack, you've got me to deal with, for starters.

Pause. Sean sighs.

Sean: I'm not trying to set him up. And I don't think Hughes is.

Gordon: Well, either he is or he isn't. What's it?

Sean: I don't know. Hughes says these things, he has crazy ideas, he gets drunk.

Gordon: He looked sober enough when I saw him.

Sean: I promise you, the first we'd heard about Hughes and Jack being partners was when Jack told you. The whole thing was Jack's idea. Hughes just went along with him. I don't know whether he's serious. Maybe he is — at the moment. All I know is (Sings.) Hughes wants me. Even if he's serious now, in two weeks he'll be bored. He'll walk out. It's a novelty.

Gordon: What are you gonna do about it?

Sean: I don't know. Warn Jack, I suppose.

— if he'll leave.

*Pause.*

*Gordon:* You know what I'd do?

*Sean:* What?

*Gordon:* Get out. Just find your mate and disappear. Jack won't listen to you or anyone. The more you want him, the more he'll go for you every day. No, take my advice. You disappear.

*Sean:* What about Hughes?

*Gordon:* What about him?

*Sean:* Well, he won't take any notice of me! If he would, we'd never have got in this mess in the first place.

*Pause.*

*Gordon (contemptuously):* I tell y'what, son. If you can't persuade him, I will.

*Pause.*

*Sean:* Why are you so anxious to protect Jack?

*Gordon:* What's that gotta do with you?

*Sean:* Nothing. It's just that... I thought you two had split up, that's all. (Pause.) I've got my business. I'll go.

*Gordon:* You reckon we're a pair of nutcases?

*Sean (nervously):* No, I don't, actually.

*Pause.*

*Gordon (contemptuously):* Listen, mate. What you are is Jack, son, is a drunk. A loud-mouthed, worn-out old drunk. Well I know him before that. I know him when he could get up on a stage and have an audience sitting out of his head, when he'd walk onto the podium, slide it open — not knowing a soul — and tell it himself: "I've got a job. You'll take him to a party and he'll have the whole crowd in stitches just pulling jokes over the air. He walked onto a room and it was... it was alive. You don't meet many people like that, people you'd... He had something, I damn... drive, power, personality — and it was just you like — but he had it. He had it all right. And I despised him." (Pause.) So he's finished... turns out. Nobody wants to know. Well he was a lion on the soap-box while I'm here. Not while I'm around.

*Pause.*

*Sean:* But... he doesn't want your help.

*Gordon:* No, he doesn't... but he'll have to take it. That's what he's gotta have.

*Pause.*

*Sean:* What are you going to do?

*Gordon:* It's up to you. I'm not looking for trouble. If you can tell your mate to stop, that's fine. If not... I'll have him.

*Sean:* You'd beat him up?

*Gordon:* I'll beat him.

*Sean:* You don't understand. Hughes doesn't mean... He got caught up, he doesn't know where he's going.

*The discarded rings.*

*Gordon:* Now leave. You eat your fish and chips and you go. You find your mate and you warn him off. Understood?

*They stare at each other. Gordon puts out to answer the door. Re-entered followed by Hughes. Salazar. Sean keeps his eyes downcast. Hughes stares at Sean with some amusement.*

*Hughes:* Well, what's that? The deaf-and-dumb Olympics?

*Gordon (to Sean):* You tell him.

*Sean:* Hughes, if you don't give up this idea

of a partnership with Jack, there'll be trouble.

*Pause. Hughes looks around ominously.*

*Hughes:* Perhaps I should go out and warm up again.

*Gordon:* Come! back, bastard — aren't you?

*Hughes (to Gordon):* Well, would you mind explaining just what a little it's about?

*Gordon:* You listen to me, damn. If you're making a fool out of Jack, just remember you've got me to deal with.

*Hughes:* Oh yeah? What is it. Winchester at noon?

*Gordon:* The best thing you can do is take... your "friend" and go.

*Hughes:* I came here to do exactly that. As far as Jack is concerned, I shall do exactly what I please.

*Sean (to Gordon):* He doesn't mean that. Look.

*Gordon (to Hughes):* Listen, mate. I've got better things to do than beat up little people.

*Hughes:* Oh really? I'd have thought that was just your style.

*Gordon (to Sean):* You talk some sense into him, I can't. Tell Jack I'll drag him in a few days. (To Hughes.) I want you, the longer this goes on, the worse it's gonna be.

*Pause. Gordon exits. Sean keeps his eyes downcast. Hughes opens the new bottle of whisky, pours himself a drink.*

*Hughes:* Hushum. The daily round of sex and violence. (Pause. Hughes regards Sean.) Well, I know I'd find you here. Suppose you're here to desert: pool, old Jack.

*Sean:* Yes.

*Hughes (tripping):* Ah, clearing up after me again. Shameful episode last night, and so much terribly bad taste (in clipped, jerky phrases) "You see, we, in the movement, are not only concerned to combat mis-understandings about ourselves amongst the general public. We wish also to increase tolerance and understanding of others amongst ourselves."

*Hughes finishes Sean's plastic smile.*

*Sean:* Sean does a much better impression of you.

*Hughes:* Ah, yes. But then Sean does everything better than me — so you can see I thoughtfully pointed out. (Pause.) Well, and did you enjoy your little chat with Sammy last night? That's where you were, was it?

*Sean:* I was straight to bed.

*Hughes:* Even better?

*Sean:* Of the God's sake. I couldn't face going home last night, that's all. There was nothing like that.

*Hughes:* Aw, come on! You can tell me! You always do. (Pause.) You coming home tonight?

*Sean:* I don't know.

*Hughes:* Well now, where are we? "Sean's indecision." I think. So, now we go on to "Sean pleading" and "Hughes' bluff" and "Hughes' graceless apology." That's right, isn't it?

*Sean:* Wrong. "Hughes plays the bluff" is usually followed by "Sean's explanation."

*Hughes is taken aback.*

*Hughes:* Well, well... well! (Assumes a prize-fighter's stance.) "Secondly away, round two!" (Hughes looks around Sean, leaning.) "And it's a Hughes, Hughes on the offense now!"

*Sean (nervously):* Jack's gone to get fish and chips. I think we should go before he comes back.

*Hughes (staring):* "And O'Sullivan is returning!" He is returning. That final sentence is creeping in.

*Sean:* Gordon is in! Stuffing. If you're not worried about Jack, at least think of your own skin.

*Hughes rings doorbell.*

*Hughes:* Sean. I am touched by your concern. However, before I leave, I'd be grateful to know — just for accuracy's sake — where hell you'll be occupying tonight.

I'm used to you disappointing people, especially I'm not used to you spreading your opinion.

*Sean:* Hughes, let's get out of here, please.

*Hughes:* Good! I'm off, moving off! You tell me. Are you coming back or not?

*Sean:* I don't know.

*Hughes (sneering):* Well, decide! I take it that is some sort of burning point!

*Pause.*

*Sean:* Are you serious about this business with Jack?

*Hughes:* Oh I see, a trade-off. You or Jack. My feelings on the feelings of some other old drunk.

*Sean:* He's not please.

*Hughes:* Bah! He's totally egotistical, totally preoccupied with himself. What he would have taken for it!

*Sean:* Can't you pity him? Can't you see he's pathetic?

*Pause.*

*Hughes:* Gladly and pathetically. Yes, I can. He makes damn sure I can. He functions on pity. He says it. "I use me, I use me, I use me." Oh yes, he uses it all right. (Shows himself.) His whole career is based on the fact that an audience will pity a couple.

See any resemblance? Sean is even better at it than Jack, and that's what you subscribe to.







a waiter: Well, you know what waiters are? I've got to work on the dance routine, but just give you the general idea, y'know. Then it go into the gaps — you, I've gotta hand you. See, I start talking about how I lost my arm. Every night I used to pray "Wine-o God, make me like Nelson!" (He waits for a laugh. Sean and Hughes remain silent.) Well, come on! Wine-o make-o! (Pause.)

**Hughes** (sarcastically): Terrible.  
**Jack** (terrified): It's fucking fantastic! (Gets drunk) a whiskey? Course there's still a lotta work to go into it, but it's all there, it's all there. Ay, where's Gordon?  
**Sean** (shouting): He said he'd be back in a few days.

**Jack**: Aw, did he? Well, he knows what he can do. Join the bloody press! (Shouts in disgust, unleashing his anger.) I'd never shed it. Three times I had to tell the stupid bugger what I wanted. And they're stone-cold. Three times! "Me, no understand!" Pottered they don't understand you. Yeah, "No understand!" "Well, chance fucking our case," I said. Understood that, are yaah, so worries (Picking up the beer.) Tell y'what, I'll stick with it, even, even, even up (Goes out.) Yeah, "No understand!"

**Sean**: Hughes looks pretty at Sean. The following dialogue is radio voice.

**Hughes**: Well. There you are. There, given half a chance, is poor old, sensitive, pathetic Jack! (Address Jack.) "All the nice boys."

**Sean**: "Up it!"  
**Hughes** (to a waiter): Face it, Sean. Face up to it. Go and talk to him, give him group therapy. He's really such a pathetic case.

**Sean** (angrily): Face what? What have I got to face up to? He really worries you, doesn't he — Jack? Don't project your hangups on to me, Hughes. You're the one who has to face "them." You not gay.

**Sean**: Sean begins to go.  
**Hughes**: Oh yes, you'd love it to be that simple, wouldn't you? Put me away under "insurance mascot."

**Sean** (sings): Sean's really at Hughes.

**Sean** (sings): Sean's really at Hughes.

**Sean**: Sean goes out. Hughes watches him go. Cheers to them.

**Jack** (off): Ay! Sean! (Appears at doorway.) What's the matter with him? Get the fuck!

**Hughes**: A request for the notebook, I'd say.

**Jack**: Ay?

**Hughes** (shouting): Ah, he'll be back. He always comes back.

**Jack** (going out): Bit bloody temperamental.

**Hughes**: A left alone on the stage thinking.

**Hughes**: Jack!

**Jack** (off): Jack?

**Hughes**: Jack, could you do the act on your own, if necessary?

**Jack**: What?

**Hughes**: Could you do the act on your own?

**Jack** (appears at the doorway).

**Jack** (concerned): What did you say?

**Hughes**: There's a chance of a job on

Saturday at the gym. I couldn't be ready on time, but there's no chance why you shouldn't take it.  
**Jack** (shrugging): Aw, y'know better? Why didn't y'all see before? What is it?

**Hughes**: It's a cultural job. As a dancer.

**Jack** (crouching): No, he? I know it, I know you'd turn out lucky!

**Hughes**: It's not hard up yet.

**Jack**: Well, it's it?

**Hughes**: Can you be ready in a half?

**Jack**: Really? That's Jack! He says!

**Hughes**: I'll have to make a phone-call.

**Jack**: Well, y'got on that phone, y'know?

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**Jack**: Well, y'got on that phone, y'know?

up, shuffle, tap, shuffle.  
**Jack**: No much. Like this. (They applaud.) Tap, shuffle, tap, shuffle, tap, shuffle, tap. Floor. He he. You're getting it!

**Hughes** (laughing): No floor on the boy!

**Jack**: Now your hands! (Changing his right arm against his leg.) Clap. And clap, shuffle, clap, shuffle, clap, shuffle, clap.

**Hughes**: He's dancing, clapping his hands! Floor!

**Jack**: Hughes! And clap, shuffle, clap, shuffle, clap, shuffle, clap.

**Hughes**: He's dancing, clapping his hands! Floor!

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**Hughes**: He's dancing, clapping his hands! Floor!

**Jack**: Hughes! And clap, shuffle, clap, shuffle, clap, shuffle, clap.



Jack puts the record on the table and begins flipping through the stack of LPs, looking for the record a flower

Jack: Just an old record — one of those do-it-yourself things

Hughes: No problem? Jack: (grinning). You don't wanna hear that?

Hughes: Ah, go on. I'm interested! Jack: No.

Hughes (singing, roughly Jack's Come on What's this — melody?)

Jack: (I'll find the Wrong Arrow)

Hughes (looking up at the record): I'm going to hear this.

Jack: Put it down! Jack reaches for the record

Hughes (singing): What's the matter with you?

Jack: I want to put it down!

Then, *struggle over the record*. It drops and breaks. Pause.

Jack (shaking his head): Best thing that could've happened to it.

Jack goes and picks up his drink. Pause.

Hughes: Well, I'd or I'd better be at it.

Jack (shaking his head): Yeah. I'll see you Saturday.

Hughes: Yeah. (Pause) Yeah. Well, be seeing you.

Hughes exits. Pause.

Jack (sighs, looking): Ah, you forget the bloody puzzle!

Sighs. Pause. Looks at the pieces of broken record. Puts his glass on the table. Sits at the table in deep thought. He is thinking about Gordon and the possibility of a reconciliation — the fact regarding modern loneliness and isolation. Alone, *possibly* begins facing the pieces of broken record together like a puzzle. Realizes what he is doing and stops. Sighs. Probably. Continues brooding, suddenly gets up, goes to the phone and dials a number.

Jack: Hello? Is that Danny? It's you. Uh-huh. Jack here. (Says to you?) Well, it's a good few years since I saw you. How old are you now? Listen, son, is Gordon your Dad, there? Ah. Well, you give him a message from me. Tell him (It couldn't pride him as to what he's)

Tell him I'm rushed at the moment with other stuff at the moment, but if he wants to see me after the show I'm doing this Saturday night, I'm willing to talk. Yeah, that's right — tell him to meet me at the thirty — outside the main gates of the zoo. (What could he possibly be?) Oh, I'll meet him. He can see the show. It starts at ten. Yeah. You got that? Right. Don't forget, will you? Be seeing you, son.

Hangs up, starts at the phone, deep in thought. Blackout.

begins to play. In the darkness, the spot is cleared and a screen constructed like two curtains is pulled across the stage in front of the set. Coloured lights, glowing with the same are projected on to the screen. Jack and Hughes enter stage-right in front of the screen. Hughes leading, showing the way. Jack wears the trousers and shirt of the preceding scene plus a dinner-jacket and a large, brightly coloured bow-tie — first around his bare neck. He has put on a blue and white and a magenta yellow, almost a wig. In his right hand he carries a large paper flower. His costume appears home-made, rough and ready. Jack and Hughes stop where the two parts of the screen meet. Jack is nervous, Hughes devil-may-care.

Jack: Am I all right? Do I look all right?

Hughes: Relax. You look terrific! Magnificent!

Mother takes a quick peep through the crack in the screen, withdraws, begins to dance in the room.

Jack (singing Hughes the flower): Here take this. (Holds the wig down.) Hughes dances, incorporating the flower into his dance. (Amused.) (Near played to a bunch of kids. Always played the clubs.)

Hughes (half dancing): Ah, you're full of it! You'll be a sensation!

Pause.

Jack (breathless): Well, that, isn't it?

Hughes (half dancing): Ah, come on! You're not serious? A professional like you?

Jack: (Grins): That. (Shows the flower expertly to Hughes.) That's all I need, less my bloody pants.

Mother stops. Taped applause, cheers. Hughes stops dancing. The lights show them, leaving the screen slowly to rise. The first.

Hughes: Well, here we go. You ready?

Jack made perfectly. Hughes bows broadly, disappears through the curtains. A brief pause.

Hughes (through a microphone over a burst of crowd noise): And now (A loud salute of front-back Jack, pronounced as an agent of service. Several red-cards, white-cards, from the crowd.) And now, folks, at great trouble and expense, we present the act and one-act only — Jack Harvey!

Jack pulls his shoulders back. Hughes comes through the curtains, hands Jack a microphone. Jack, nervously, and confused, gives Hughes the flower, takes the microphone, and rushes through the curtains. As Hughes looks in amazement, surprise at the flower, the lights change — to reveal Jack behind the screen, his back to the theatre audience, poised and ready to begin his act. As Jack begins, Hughes shakes his head and laughs silently. Once Jack is in a bar or two into his song and dance, Hughes (facing the theatre audience and holding the flower like a microphone) begins to mimic Jack's manner, moving the song and dancing. Jack steps in time with him, as it appears Jack's reverse screen-image.

Jack (singing): "All the nice boys love a girl!" (Sighing of laughter in the

dimmer-half crowd.) "All the nice boys love a girl!" (Laughter increases.) Jack's dance — and Hughes's great, stark dance, come about. "For there's something about a sailor. Well, you know what sailors are!" Jack, stoned, continues the song and dance, going on to the second verse. Hughes does the same, though moving. The dimmer-half crowd is in ecstasy. During the last few bars, Sean enters and jumps appears in the front of the screen, steps left. It's covered by Hughes, he watches him. At the song concludes, Hughes notices Sean. Hughes is delighted. They stare at each other.

Jack: Hello, sailor!

Laughter.

Hughes: Hello, stranger!

No response from Sean.

Jack: (Steps back on screen, since I want to be high — oh, you are real!)

Laughter.

Sean (halfly): (His pants) I can dance. He's going to beat you up.

As Jack goes his way, Sean, Hughes enters his entrance as if to say: "Is that so?" Suddenly, both out the flower in a comic, placatory way.

Jack: That's what happened to my arm.

Sean: (Says to you) You lost it? He's looking for you — Gordon.

Jack: Every night, I used to pray.

Hughes: Come with me!

Jack: No, it's true! Every night, I used to pray.

Sean: Oh no. Norman Macdonald!

Jack: "Please God, make me like Nelson."

Long roar of laughter. Sean begins to go, steps outwards by the applause and laughter. Jack finishes his routine, automatically leaves the microphone behind the screen and rushes through the screen at rapid applause and cheering begins. Simultaneously, the lighting changes so that the two appear solid and dimly lit.

Jack (to Sean): Ah ha! Ah ha! Did you see it? Did you see me? (To Hughes) You heard? You old bugger! Listen to it! Listen to 'em! I bloody killed 'em! I crucified 'em! Ha ha! (Dancing and singing.) All the nice boys! Even forgot, my bloody flower! (Shows flower down.) Ha! Did you see it? Did you see it? Did you see it when I said, "Please God, make me like Nelson!" (Discovered by Jack, Gordon appears stage right. Crowd noise, have crowd completely, and the stage is brightly lit.) (The) So now, my friend, I'm surprised 'em! I'm looking surprised 'em! (Jack, steps moving Hughes's attention to Gordon. Jack turns, sees Gordon, rushes over to him, full of goodness, almost comically.)

Gordon: Ah, Gordon, did you see it? Did you see it? (Looks away, to himself, smiling, an almost joyful with gratitude.) Ah... I've not got it. Jesus Christ, I've not got it. (Laughs to himself.) Gradually, the actors are slowly staring at each other. Well, what's the matter with you? (Affectionately pokes Hughes on the shoulder.) Hughes!

Hughes makes no response. Jack looks from Hughes to Gordon and back to Hughes. Begins to jump.

## SCENE 2

A moment of silence. A pop record — of the fourth Mateo (type or machine)

Gordon: He's a poof! He sat you up. They're all poofs out there. They laughed 'em they thought you were some half-mad old queen. (Jack is thunderstruck, whispers Gordon to Jack.) Please? Well, ask him, go on. Ask him whether it's true. And turn to Magpie. Please.

Magpie: It's true. But so what? I got what I wanted, you got what you wanted. You said you'd let me stay there.

Please.

Gordon (moving as if to hit Magpie): You bastard!

Jack (urgently, shouting angrily) against Gordon: You touch him and I'll —

I don't need you to fight me bloody bastard! Please. Turn to Magpie! And you. Are you. (Sings, pulls off the wig and the false nose, throws them on the stage.)

Please.

Gordon: Come on, I'll run you home.

Jack: Stay away from me.

Please.

Gordon: Jack, that is nothing, forget it. Just a crowd of kids, bunch of bloody queers. (To Magpie.) So you're as happy now. Made your day, you little bastard.

Magpie: Ah, Gordon, you're such a hero, such a good mate.

Gordon: Don't push me.

Gordon runs forward as Magpie runs back to Jack.

Gordon: Jack. Look. Next week I've got a date. The big one. Carly's coming, and he's bringing some mates, ladies from the show. If it goes off all right, it's the contract with Carly, for TV. I can get you on as the club, say, so they can see you, see your work. You could even do that. (Then sniggering quietly.) Please. Jack, nod for me! (Jack, it's all I can do. (No response.) Arggh!) Well, what else you gonna do? Spend the rest of your life playing drag queen in little poofs?

Please.

Jack: Maybe I'd just prefer that — to working with you.

Please. Jack begins to go off.

Magpie (hastily): I tell you what, you'd make a fortune.

Jack (pauses for an instant, goes). Gordon starts after him.

Magpie: Well, you win some, you lose some.

Gordon: Ah, you're on the ball of a poet.

Magpie: Ah, come on.

Turns to Sam, suddenly pleads with him.

Gordon: Ah yes, you're happy now. You poof. Made your bloody day. Destroying a delicate old cripple.

Gordon no response. Pure Sam. Magpie begins to walk away, past Gordon.

Magpie: Don't give me that, sweetheart. I'm not the one who walked out on him. I'm not the one who ditched him after twenty-eight years.

Gordon punches Magpie in the face.

Magpie: He's back, back to his face. He now begins to bleed.

Gordon puts off after Jack. Lights grow gradually colder and dimmer. Magpie stands motionless for a moment. Wipes blood from his upper lip, expects the blood. Grows thoughtful, depressed.

Sam (softly): Are you all right?

Magpie looks up, looks away.

Magpie (breathless): Not really, but I'll manage.

Sam: If you were a doctor?

Magpie shakes her head. Lights gradually fading. Magpie runs, looks worriedly and questioningly at Sam. Please. Sam turns, begins to go.

Sam: Well.

Magpie: Sam?

Sam stops. Stays. Please. Turns to face Magpie.

Magpie: Are you staying with Sam?

Sam: Yes.

Magpie: I was thinking, if I got a job, I could support you. Leave you free to do the M4.

Sam: You wouldn't be any different, Magpie.

Magpie (told suddenly): Well, I might have a broken nose.

Then, stare at each other. Blackout.

Gordon, in a fellow spot, appears on the other side of the stage, carrying a microphone and singing. Slide by slide.

Gordon: Thank you! Thank you very much, thank you! (Holds his hand up for silence.) Ladies and gentlemen, a lot of you will have recognised that song. It belongs to a very special bloke — a name of mine. Ladies and gentlemen, I present the one and only Jack Harvey!

Jack (emerges through the doorway, slightly drunk). Gordon leads the aged applause.

Jack: Good evening, good evening, one and all.

Gordon: Oh, y'gan mate, all right?

Jack: I'm right. Right as rain.

Gordon: Well, I'm gonna leave you to it, Jack.

Jack: Good on y'! But I've got a big hand for Gordon Dobbs! (Gordon goes to audience.) Well, come on! Give him a clap — not give him the clap, eh? Sorry, eh?

Where do you think you are — the Opera House? (Jack urges the audience to applaud. Gordon slaps Jack on the back and runs off. Jack watches him go.) Yeah, he's a good bloke, Gordon. A good bloke.

It's a big night for Gordon tonight, you know. A — very — big — night. Why?

You ask me why? Because here at this very audience there are — taken notice. My outfit! Now, the next question you'll yourself is: 'Why are there talent scouts?'

Why are there talent scouts? Because, if you also go on all right, good old Gordon gets a TV contract. So let's hear it for Gordon! A big hand for Gordon Dobbs! Come on, if you don't wanna give him a hand, how about me? I could do with a hand, couldn't I, dear? I could do with one! (The atmosphere grows uncomfortable. Jack starts round at the audience.) All right then, you don't wanna clap? You don't wanna clap. Your decision, an' I wouldn't wanna force you. Now a job. Fetch you three little like the one about the voice with three daughters, Faith, Hope and Charity. He ended up in an instant change, 'cos charity began at home. See, Gordon said to me, 'Black', he said, 'Jack, I want you to be in on this. I want you to be in on this.' Now, I guess why. No point in ask-

ing me why. Because Gordon thinks I'm a no-hoper. You know that? A no-hoper-hoper. What he forgot was, I don't take that. I don't take that from anyone. (Looks up at the lighting-des, snigger.) Selly buggers up there doesn't know what to do. Go on! Black me out, I dare y'! Ah, dear. No, but Gordon didn't like being a poofier in our act, 'Pam. He thought. (Magpie.) He thought it wasn't good enough for him. Thought it was. (Sings) up his eyes and getting at the audience. I thought it was a bit — say — like. So he ditched it on. Chucked me in. (Cupps.) Please. Gordon turns at the doorway.

Gordon: Jack, come on.

Jack: It's Gordon. Let's hear it for Gordon! Gordon's whole frightened of acting like a poof! (Phonetic.) I warned you, didn't I? You don't play fancy buggers with me, mate!

Gordon comes up to grab the microphone.

Gordon: Jack!

Jack (to audience): Yeah. You know, I did a show for some poofs. For a little bastard who turned out to be a poof. (Gordon jumps.)

Round at audience. Gordon comes forward and grabs the microphone. Jack snigger. Firmness! Ah, a course, Gordon couldn't say out of it. Could y'?

Ah, no. Gordon had to stick his bloody nose in. He had to fight his bloody battles. (Jack snigger. Fear.) Hum and his wife and

(Looking at a man in the audience.) his bloody mate. Carly Mason! (Mason lights go up.) That's right, mate! You try and get me off!

Jack: You try and get me into the way!

That's what they all do, don't worry. (Gordon has dropped back.) You know what it's like not be able to write your own name? You know what that's like? To get a big contract and sign your name like a ten-year-old child? A tape of a three-year-old, belabouring. When you're sending. Begun! (That's right. Come on! That's what you do to a professional! (To audience.) You bastards! I'll mean you dead! I'll slay you! I'll massacre you! I'll fucking massacre you!

Blackout. Silence.

Mick Rodger was educated at the University of Adelaide and Balliol College, Oxford. He graduated with first class honours in English. At university he was distinguished both as an actor and director, which led to his training under the English ITV Repertory Theatre Trainers' Directors' Scheme. He then worked extensively as a director in English theatre and, for a time, as director of London's Open Space Theatre with Charles Marowitz. For three years he ran his own independently theatre company, the Drama Theatre Company. The company toured into inaccessible coastal areas and performed in non-theatre venues to people who did not ordinarily go to the live theatre.

In 1986 he returned to Australia at the invitation of the Melbourne Theatre Company to direct the Australian premier of Peter Shaffer's *Equus*. He stayed on to direct Company's *The Double Dealer* (Shaffer's last) from the Sea and Sydney Opera's *Alfred Arron Sargant*. He became theatre consultant to the Aus-



tralian Council, from 1987 to 1994, he returned to the theatre to direct *The Crossing of Niagara*, again for the Melbourne Theatre Company.

For the past year he has been working as a two-line director in both Melbourne and Sydney. Last September he directed Jack Hibbard's *A Train to Mafra* for the Old Tote Theatre Company, followed by his own adaptations *André and The Game of Love* and *Chances* for the Melbourne Theatre Company. He has just finished directing *The Fall Guy* in Melbourne and is currently working on a production of *Wild Oats* to be staged in the York Theatre at the Seymour Centre for the Old Tote in June. After that, he returns to Melbourne to direct David Rudkin's *André*.

Mick Rodger is also a playwright and has had two plays performed in Melbourne and Sydney: *Phenomena* and *The Double Dealer*. He has just completed a full-length play called *The French Day*.

## THE FALL GUY

# A director's casebook of rehearsal

by Mick Rodger

Neal Coward once said, "Never complain, never explain" or words to that effect. It is an adage that I have tended to remember, particularly when I am on the brink of going into print. When a production is working well, a chemistry often develops between director and cast. It is close and undefinable. I suppose it is based on a mutual respect, pleasure and trust. To go into print describing the intimate details of that chemistry seems like a betrayal of that trust. It probably is, but it feels as though it is.

A theatre casebook is usually objectively written by a third person: a spectator outside the theatre of conflict. It is a surprise, then, to be writing one's own. How can I be objective? I cannot, so I will [I]!

## HISTORY

My first encounter with *The Fall Guy* goes back to the 1976 Canberra Playwrights' Conference, in which I was involved as one of the three directors publicly workshoping new texts. The play was given a public reading only; it was not workshoped (it should have been). Nonetheless, I feel sure that the play would not have received a production, or at least not as readily or as soon, had it not been accepted by the conference Theatre Board (Australian Council) into note!

When I first heard the play, I recognised its (then) unworked potential. I liked its pace and humour. I was particularly pleased when John Sumner asked me to direct

the play for the MTC, for I considered that over recent years that company has displayed an impressive record in introducing new Australian playwrights and producing new Australian plays. I was delighted, too, because the play seemed to offer me a strong contrast to the work I had recently been directing (for example, my own adaptations of the classics, *Order of Monks* and Marlowe's *The Game of Love and Chances*). It retained the idea of working in depth with a small cast on a new play with an otherwise Australian setting.

## CASTING

With *The Fall Guy* I felt that I already had some notion of the characters I was dealing with. Jack, the well-to-do, legged, well-paying, aggressive and head-mouthed drunken refugee from the fast disappearing world of vaudeville, Gordon, his apparently hopelessly, possibly sane, probably legged partner for 28 years, Hagley, the high-energy, cynical, vulgar, exhibitionist counterpart to Jack in a gay day and Sean, his quietly understood, "hardened" homosexual partner.

I had decided that Norman Kaye should play Jack. He was the original reading of the part in Canberra. I had found his understanding (even then) of the comic and tragic dimensions of the character and his own aggressive energy as a performer. Stephen Oldfield would take Sean. He had originally played the boy for me in *Equus* and I knew that he had a presence and

stiffness on stage which could identify speech between the lines of the text. Unconsciously, of course, I was already beginning to compensate for what was in the writing of Sean, which became more apparent in rehearsal.

I found the other two characters more difficult to cast. Eventually I selected Mervyn Drake. He had a quality which I regarded as indispensable for anyone to play Hagley: an intense passion as an actor and a realism physically on stage. It is that quality (shaped and developed in rehearsal) which has guided him each outstanding moment for his performance. Gordon was the last and trickiest to cast, perhaps because he is the least specifically characterised in the script. I needed an actor who could, in performance, be physically threatening ("The braver" Jack refers to) or warmly charming. Someone with song-and-dance experience would not come amiss, I thought. I found such an actor in Terry Donohue.

## DESIGN

I made a conscious decision to design the play as well as to direct it. I wanted to keep the whole processible until (after all, it was a very small cast to begin with). By designing and directing I could keep a totality of concept and also change the design immediately and painlessly to accommodate what the actors discovered in rehearsal. I often think that we work back-to-front in that regard. The design should identify



## 'Healthy mutual self-criticism and challenging of each other's ideas'

emerge after a long rehearsal process, not be cut and dried before that process begins. But the conveyor-belt rolls on . . . Time and money seldom permit such creative luxuries.

Although the play contains naturalistic scenes, it is not in, and of, itself, naturalistic. I wanted no detailed and extensive rehearsal in the set, merely a suggestion here and there of an otherwise empty space. I am tired of elaborate and expensive sets. As a director I now incline much more towards the empty stage and the bare board on which actors are crossably sculptured out of light and then left alone to play their part.

It was not surprising, therefore, that the set for *The Fall Guy* emerged as skeletal, even cryptic.

### RESERVATIONS AND REVISIONS

From the first time that I heard the play read in Canberra, I held certain reservations. In particular, the characters of Sam and Gordon seemed too underwritten. At times they were more "fools" in the comedy of Jack and Hughes. Similarly, the end of the play, from the beginning of the scene in the gay dance, was, for various reasons, unsatisfactory. In the altered draft which I subsequently read at the MTC, various cuts and additions had been made, in particular to the end of the play. I still, however, found the latter weak — and unworkable in its new form.

This second draft had the Hughes/Gor-

don brawl and the Hughes/Sam confrontation occurring simultaneously with Jack's gay-dance scenes. More than anything, I was afraid that the divided focus would confuse the audience's attention. I discussed the problem with the playwright, who then provided me with a third draft in which the various scenes at the end of the play occurred sequentially rather than simultaneously. It was a marked improvement, but I still had reservations. Ultimately I decided to go into rehearsal with this third draft and to see what developed when the actors began to work on it.

### REHEARSAL

The following is taken practically verbatim from my notes made during the rehearsal process.

**DAY 1: Monday, 16 February 1977**  
Production meeting in the morning. I ask for follow-ups on performance to create feeling of vaudeville and club acts and fluorescent-strip lighting over stage to contrast and give depressed air to interior scenes. I stress need to keep options open (particularly staging of last scenes) while actors discover script in rehearsal.

First read-through in afternoon, followed by discussion (playwright present). High level of enthusiasm all round and some good ideas floated. We begin to test an aspect of the play. Good start.

**DAY 2: Tuesday, 1 March** Tarry unavailable for rehearsal, so we start with

central pub scene. Good sense to take as random because we immediately discover character. I stress don't want to "block" anything yet. Let's just move through play and find out. Tackle subtext and see what it suggests. Marvyn and Stephen take to dialogue immediately and spontaneously. Search for motives and reasons goes increasingly deep. Characters begin already emerging. Whole day goes much faster than I expected to soon.

**DAY 3: Wednesday, 2 March** Same process continues on last and first scenes of Act 1. Slow discovery movement through script. No attempt at stage. Agree to define opening stand-up comedy routine as a bit. Jon Finlayson has photographed scenes (delighted to discover he's doing it), thereby giving it a context. Norman making great headway into Jack's drunkenness and cruelty. We also recognise Jack's vulnerability. Latent violence and aggression in all characters emerging and discussed. Energy and enthusiasm high. All begin planning song.

**DAY 4: Thursday, 3 March** We tackle long opening scene of Act II, moving slowly, taking a lot, throwing up ideas. We run (juggle) through whole play up to end of Act II, Scene 1. Discuss phenomena of overall shape and overall character development. We have noted a number of layers off the text, probed motivation, exposed what characters really saying to each other, identified where light and shade will be ultimately necessary in mood and pace. Agreement that script is extremely peppered with stage directions. They are at down two marks at this stage.





Must work out the fundamental from the fanciful.

**DAY 3 Friday 4 March** We extensively explore the last quarter of play. Unpleasant feeling that gay scene late play down. Up to this point everyone fairly enthusiastic about dialogue, characterisation and humour in play. From this point on, a feeling that the script changes style, becomes more literary, even satirical. Too tame, too cryptic. Not convincing any more. Long discussion follows. We measure alternatives. Wouldn't it make more sense if Jack was not cut-called off the stage by gay audience, but accepted, even applauded? What effect would it have on Jack? On the other characters? Only the playwright can answer that. We decide to return to working in detail on earlier parts of play while I contact the playwright regarding the last quarter.

**DAYS 4-9 7 to 10 March** We work intensively on Act I and Act II, Scene 1. As character strongly emerges, so we make joint decisions on costumes. (This is better than putting the car before the horse). The dancers are slowly (possibly at first) choreographed. The permits stand-up routine to be roughly worked. I am reminded of my own experience of playing parts and work against's clubs in England. Please rush to have Murray (an accomplished pianist) put down on tape, in a studio, piano versions of the two songs.

A lot of hard work in doing scene by scene, day by day. Progress slow but sure. I sense actors' problem of not knowing final outcome of the play, hence a loss of direction. No lights to be seen at the end of the curtain. But still a reasonable ensemble fed to everything. Healthy mutual self-criticism and challenging of each other's ideas. More two. Pub scene in particular takes on extraordinary natural air. Place of life where nothing is too significant or pointed. I know it's terribly slow and under-dramatic (wouldn't hold an audience), but it's the right feel in this stage.

**DAY 10 Friday 11 March** Morning Playwright (has been Sydney and gone to rehearsal). We run (skipped) through all that we have rehearsed so far. We discuss and discuss it.

Afternoon. We sit down and discuss, for several hours, the problems of the last quarter of the play. We explain to playwright our misgivings and criticisms, she explains hers. Could Jack be applauded by the gay audience? Playwright raises the idea. Very negative at first. We try compromise. My worry (and the playwright's) is that it might become another play, a different play. The problem, it seems to me, must be solved within the parameters already established by the text. Gradually we all collectively feel our way towards the truth.

It is satisfying but immensely productive. It's then that I'm glad we've developed such an ensemble in the past two weeks. Everyone reacts warm but not delirious.

**DAY 11 Monday 14 March** The half way mark in rehearsal gone. The playwright today provides us with another ending. We move, read and discuss it. It seems to work and overcomes most of our problems. Involves use of scenes (as also suggested by one of the actors last Friday). It is not lost on reaching a fundamental writing problem by production gimmicks, but at least it helps control burst of emotion and provides chance for continuous action. (rather than jerky, inter-cut scenes to tie up loose ends as in previous drafts).

**DAYS 12 and 13 15 and 16 March** We are now able to look closely at Jack's final monologue to the audience. This has remained largely unchanged from beginning of rehearsal but left unorchestrated because it struck out of events of gay scene. We discuss content and intention. Does Jack simply break down or is it a premeditated act?

**DAYS 14 and 15 17 and 18 March** Is rehearsed, the resolution of Scene 14/light

rehearsing scenes (also scene with you and the actors. They find it awkward. We question the playwright. Is the audience to think the relationship will break up or continue at the end of the play? The playwright wants it to be ambiguous. Seems to me that if they came together after their final line there is no ambiguity. We assume they stay together, if only briefly. Book the playwright to think about it over the weekend.

**Sunday 20 March** Private revolution in tranquility. Three quarters of the rehearsal period has now gone. From making exceptionally fast progress at the beginning of rehearsal we have now regressed to a snail's pace. I feel restless and preoccupied. We're not so far advanced as we should be at this stage. Is that so many changes and counter-changes in script and action have demoralised the actors? Nothing solid to hang on to? Outstanding problems must be resolved quickly now, and irrevocably, if we are to be ready for an audience in a week. The process of leaving options open must now change to shutting and holding the doors. I decide on a radical change of direction, starting tomorrow.

**DAY 16 Monday 21 March** The playwright gives us a final version of the Scan/Highly sequence which involves mixture of Scan (with Myers, one of the two powerful off-stage characters of the play). After brief discussion, it is unproblematic to incorporate suggestions made by the actors. I ask the playwright to desert us until the following Friday so that we can forget, temporarily, about script and on-writes, and concentrate on working up the performance as a public event.

We begin with a straight run-through. That immediately identifies where we are going wrong. We are too consistently slipping to register the "significance" of the script we have so carefully studied. Passes have become too unalike. They are looking back the past. The heavier aspects

of the play are weighing in, down, the crump and humor have all but gone. With them the lightness and shade. Everyone is playing on one continuous note. No major and minor themes, no change of mood.

As technical director, I ask the actors to conduct a run-through at breakneck speed: "Just play the beat," I say. "Don't stop to think about what it means." The exercise almost works. It is thwarted only by the depressing atmosphere of waiting lights and the passing chains of an empty stage where the voices boom up into the roof and are lost. It shows us how much the actors can handle when given attack and speed. The inconspicuous pauses immediately provide us with our changes of mood.

**DAY 17 Tuesday, 22 March.** Back in the rehearsal room, I begin at the top of the play and slowly move through it, restoring and developing the comedy and lightness. Instead of shouting lines at each other, the characters use the same lines to joke at each other's expense. Immediately we have potential audience laughter while retaining the significance of the plot. Comedy is not freedom but the most serious way human beings have of coping anything. I ask Morvyn to play a whole scene as though it were throw-away, because throwing away comedy. The exercise works immediately: it is very funny, but also comically easy to hear to. When actors comically shout, it is not easy to hear. The exercise points the way to what is now becoming a radical change of direction. Underplaying becomes the keynote. Suddenly, as a result, what each character says becomes clearer, more genuine and thus more "significant" in the true sense.

Suddenly, I ask Norman to experiment with various levels of drunkenness for Jack. How drunk can he become without losing us or losing his own articulation as an actor?

**DAYS 18 and 19: 23 and 24 March.** The process goes on. Now it is a race against the clock. Will I have enough time to revise all the play in this fashion with the actors?

We take another look at the Sam/Hughes final scene and make some alterations and minor cuts.

I stress to the actors that, from a technical point of view, they should always try to tag emotional reactions and verbal responses together. To react, and then say the line, takes longer and produces more pauses. That in turn drags down the pace etc.

**DAY 20 Friday 23 March.** Despite sudden change in direction of past week, I sense that we all feel as though we've now finally emerged from that dark and viscous tunnel into the sunlight.

**DAY 21 Saturday, 24 March.** Final run-through. At the risk of mixing my metaphors, I feel as though we might have now come into the home-straight.

*Production weekend.* Over the weekend the production is helped, in particular, by a very acute understanding of the play's needs and a sensitive lighting plot by the MTB's lighting designer, James Lewis.

**Tuesday 28 March.** The production gets an enthusiastic response from its first public showing. They are a preview audience. I have asked the actors to play it tight and fast, relying on their own energy and adrenaline to push the evening through. They are surprised by the frequent laughter and don't have time to stop for it.

**Wednesday 29 March.** Post-mortem on the previous evening's performance. Our change of direction in the past week has borne fruit. Go into the second preview performance relaxed and more confident. I say "Play for every ounce of comedy that is legitimately yours, even at the risk of losing pace. Re-discover the play's momentum through performance time."

They do so and, although slow, the production receives a much bigger and more positive response.

**Thursday, 30 March.** Tonight we officially open the play. The two previews have taught us a lot: we need a balance between tight and light playing and being confident enough to stop and enjoy the comedy, entice the audience and finally find the dramatic moments without losing pace and energy.

It's the half-hour call and I find that my job as a surrogate audience is now almost over. But the first performance is really only the beginning.

## CONCLUSION

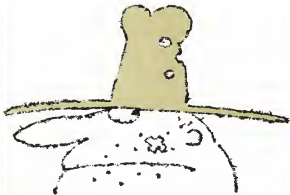
If we are to believe the critics, our peers and the public, it seems the final product on stage worked exceptionally well. But I personally believe that there are still flaws in the script. The characters of Sam and Gordon are underwritten, they are only convenient adjuncts to the protagonists. The joyfulness and aftermath scenes are still insufficiently involved within the tone established by the earlier part of the play. I am also inclined to think the actual relationship is too starchy and implausible. The play was made to work for those people who performed it; that production is that time. A group of dedicated actors overcome their problems with humor and resourcefulness.

The script is strong in its dialogue and vitality. It shows a playwright who is uncompromised but who has undoubted talent and promise. It would be a pity if such qualities were left unfulfilled. It would have to be a pity if the playwright did not re-write the last 15 minutes of the play.





Q



## Two hearty cheers for an exuberant QTC production

### THE LAST OF THE ANKERSMEN

RICHARD FOTHERINGHAM

*The Last of the Ankersmen* by John Fowles  
Queensland Theatre Company at the Grand  
Brisbane 22 June 1977. Director, Don  
MacLachlan. Designers, Peter Crooks, stage  
manager, David Graham.  
Cast: Doug, Phil Myers; Harry, Johnny Johnston;  
Paddy, Kenneth Newman; Tanna, David Chisholm;  
Tom, Peter Kewels; Mabel, Susan Parr;  
Molluska, Douglas Hedge; Tanna, Don  
Crooks; Cliff, Ron Layne; Understudy, Warren  
Meredith.

Hi kids! Welcome to the WWI War, where the craggy William Holden likeness of Don Crooks represent the aging tank star, whose big costly disputes could fill a Grand Canyon with empty beer cans, and where a man's don't is as big and as dangerous as a thorny dingoo. With Sylvester Stallone as the new scrapper

who's out to depose the sheriff, and a serious appearance by Bruce Lee who paralyzes Sylvester with a neat karate chop, even the day for old WWI, and takes the first place out of town when the disputes find out about his big payrol job. Don't miss *The Last of the Ankersmen*, on tour throughout Queensland and then playing in Brisbane (read R for language).

There's a serious point to that flippant opening. *Ankersmen* is a play by John Fowles (presumably based on his own experience, since the character of Mabel has similarities with his biographical note) set in the barracks of a mining camp in the north-west of Western Australia. Nine men, no women. The plot works towards a resolution which is plausibly silly and along the lines of my first paragraph, but along the way it manages to make a number of deeper thrusts into the psychology of Australian men-without-women. It's been given an excellent production by the QTC, which I saw at Gympie at the start of its country tour. The local pallies arrived out in the numbers of 40 were extremely male, and it's the sort of play that needs massive feminist criticism to give a necessary counter-balance to its indulgence of the

Australian male mythos which such a milieu evokes. Such a point of view might well distort the play as the sublimated behaviour of adolescent male members. As one who has worked as such change and who now spends much of the year performing plays on them, I'd like, however, to pursue a different line of criticism by looking at the play in the light of a reality I know.

*Ankersmen*, looked at from my subjective point of view, is not one play but many. The first act is realistic, delineating eight men who choose this life and making shrewd comments on their reasons. The second act consists of three short scenes, at least the first two of which are puzzlingly irrelevant to the progress of the story. The play seemed to be moving towards an episodic mosaic-from-the-lives-of narrative. But in the final act the characters are blown up to the mythical hero and villain proportions of my opening paragraph.

However, there is purpose in such methods. In retrospect, the second act which I found confusing was clearly intended to involve us with the characters by relapsing on their lives, feelings and opinions as those chosen more intimate scenes, thus engaging our sympathies and

blowing up the characters to epic proportions. It's a technique I'd question, for it all too noticeably subverts the attitude of critical inquiry which any study of Australian men in that day and age ought to be encouraging. Needless to say, I loved the first act: the most exciting. It's grossed out fairly as observable reality, and Powers knows that there are important reasons why these eight men are together in a remote part of the world — reasons which have nothing to do with big money or love of the outdoor life. When I worked in such places, my complaints were petty annoyances: town boys who'd slipped the shogan wedding, failed farmers. The old Australian myth — the rich get richer and the poor go missing — is lying dead. Nowadays the townsmen get richer and the poor either tarry to them (and get a little up the creek) or stay in town and lose their jobs. The men in *Blackback* are not here, and the one sitting throughout the play underlines the idea of the harembs in a cage: the total collapse of men on the run from society and from themselves. There is no black man present, but otherwise Powers's eight workers are a representative sample of such men. We see them drinking, playing poker, and checking one another, and the hierarchy of power (usually fit power) is cleverly laid out before us. By the final interval we were checking closely at their areas. It was, however, something of a surprise to run so close to the second and third acts and find that we were supposed to love them.

Joe MacCollum's production for the QTC succeeds in drawing strong characterizations from most of the actors, and it moves briskly and confidently in the first and third acts. TV has made us all more critical of "stage" effects, and some coarse make-up and occasionally over-theatrical dramatists were flaws which will no longer be flaws when the production has to cope with the larger SGR Theatre. No one seems to have solved the problem of effective lighting on a touring act in any Arts Council production I've ever seen, and that was an exception, with the margins of the stage very gloomily veiled. Again, that variable stage conditions should encourage the

The production seems to recognize the shift in style from reality to myth, and after a sparse, direct opening, the scenes of the second act are linked by music which, as well as covering the time lapses, gives a slightly ethereal atmosphere to the ensuing events. The effect was that of a prime accordeon being played at a distance, and had both mythical and historical overtones. I'm not sure it was an altogether successful device — its introduction comes as a shock when the resumption of the action — but certainly made the transition to this larger-than-life conclusion, which was ridiculous only in retrospect.

Everyone, says Rainer in his film *The Rider of the Green*, has his reasons. The best of the recent Australian dramatic writings have been illustrations of that

ness, whether it be matters, literary lectures, at Cheltenham. But the weakness is even of even the best of that best has been the inability to represent a pluralistic social perspective to go beyond the conflict of reasons within the narrow circle of the personal characters to the larger conflict with the world as general in *Amadeus*, the major characters of Mad Dog and Tanya fairly suggest other lives and other values, but they remain minor and unimportant to the play as large. And so to the end Packer succeeds to unimportant character celebration and a wide range resolution, and what looked like being a masterpiece finished up as a better-than-average *Corcoran-Spencer* yarn. Two heavy scenes on schizophrenia, and (as I said to my fellow metaphor) there goes out of town.

A play that is  
"unspeakably morbid  
and sentimental  
by turns"

WHEELAND AND HOFFMANN

L&amp;P: H&amp;T/HF/01P

Debra and Helmut G. Fennel Miller  
Shirley Ann Thomas, Burbank, opened 89  
May 1977. Decorat. by Thomas Lighting  
design, Susan Brown costume design, Art  
Hansen

[illegible]

The impact on me entered the Brechtian Anti-Theatre addendum was a good one. On the stage, the setting was dark and forbidding — a series of angular stone walls putting hard into the acting area with a raised ambulatory in the back. On such a dark stage (the opening can be little more than 10 feet), the spectacle appears directly suggested the interior of those large medieval clerical establishments which must have subjugated the flesh every bit as successfully as the gothic cathedrals elevated the soul.

The effect was properly sparse and cold, and self-paced (shirts, chinos, a bed and little else) enhanced the pressure, functional fashion, throughout.

Then the lights went down, and a cluster of minor technical fumbles perked the opening, as they were to mark the performance from then to some thereafter. I learned later that there was one real culprit: a chandelier causing a flutter in the lights, but that did not explain some of

exceedingly massive lighting fixtures which are carried the wrong on many occasions, but did it just fly some absolutely beautiful swatching of sound from speaker to speaker, or two unexplored blasts of music that intruded momentarily on the action (That was real, I must add—as everyone said).

All this took its toll on a showman who wanted a clearly established and well-maintained podium on which to stand. The director, Ian Thomson, had gone a long way in this. It is interesting to remark, by the way, how many historical points he has chosen to focus in recent years. Specially affected was his handling of a "brooding" "chosen" of monks and men who hovered in the background of almost every scene. They were so meticulously introduced as the influence of Mother Church must have been in the Middle Ages.

Two things, however, seemed at variance with the necessary severity. One was the music: While dramatically appropriate, it was a rag-bag selection from different periods — even this century — and occasionally, grandly orchestrated, so that it worked against the atmosphere of austerity. The same can be said of the videos, Rankin's film and fully-grown kids, which alternated flooded the eye.

The costumes, on the whole, were well-considered and made, though there was a garish contrast when one character in marigold-gold and another in bright-blue were backed by the half-green light. Generally, the pair was not in motion. The male and male sometimes looked more like religious than a musical comedy character than individuals.

In the end, it was the performances which did not measure up to the demands. The responsibility for this lies partly with the director and partly with the actors. They simply failed to evoke the monumental and legendary passion of the revolution, which should be archetypal and average. Nor did the surrounding characters do more than suggest the terrible enormity of the sexually repressive society to which they felt victim.

For all that, Ben Greely, an Alaskan, fully accepted the final agonies of a great man and spent grappling with the consequences of his mistakes otherwise for *Malcolm: True Believer*, as the 17-year-old lady, seemed rather to at what one might have expected something fresh, warm, and generous.

Jeff Hayes provided an ample and compassionate Gilles de Yammot — prey that is, as good for a sniper got a hot heavy with the snake-up. One would have liked to see more of Dorothy Buckland, an English-Godard she had only one short scene, but at that brief span, the *de-mo* managed to give us a sense of the past as the present.

As to the play, it is unpleasantly over-the-top and sentimental by turns, and sometimes just plain silly. It is clearly symptomatic of a contraction, and the device of using a gay married man bent on having Albiard to reassure us in order to get money to finance his own last is both uncomfortable and crude — an example of the sick nature of the play. Hardly worthy of the accolade bestowed it was given on that collection.



Edgar Wallace as Henry Carr, Helen Hough as Cecile Carrington

'A wonderful place to take your wits for a refreshing evening walk'

## TERMINES

Age Group	Total (%)	Male (%)	Female (%)
18-24	15	10	20
25-34	25	20	30
35-44	35	30	40
45-54	45	40	50
55-64	55	50	60
65+	65	60	70

Interviewed by Tom Scoppard, National de Wolf  
Thomas Lindbergh, Wolf Associates Oregon

18 May 1971 Director, John Wilson, designer,  
Carlson Machine

Henry Carr, Edgar Menzies, Towns Tapp,  
Eduard von Markolsberg, James Jones, Gerald  
Hastings, Vladimir Jyck Uyuan, Geoff  
Elsie Bennett, Ima King, Gambleton Carr  
Judy Nunn, Cecily Carnallory, Helen Hough  
Nadezhda Kravtchenko, Manda Camran.

Pop, bang, pow, crackle, zip, swoosh  
buckle, plunk, splatter, fyke, thump, rattle,  
boom, zing, tap-tap-tap clap-clap  
whistle CLAP CLAP-CLAP **Enter**  
My poor attempt at an onomatopoeic  
word-gesture of the signature of Tom  
Stoppard's *Forward to the Hole-in-the-*

Still, but what else can one say? (The theme, by the way, is where the play falls immediately into a continuous confusion in the latter half, during a boring harangue by Lennox on the relations of Ari to Truce Notwithstanding Society — a subject on which Stoppard's Lennox is as unapologetically unimpassioned as was the historical original.)

In the busy minutes of this interview, Hillel also reviewed the film's production of Travolta, and made some very judicious remarks about the play's plot. I find myself, after the Perth production, applauding Hillel's *insouciance* of this piece of Shakespearean champagne for the theatre: a certainty in and of the most wonderful wing-waistly boudoir — which is perhaps only to be expected when James Joyce and the celebrated Papa of Dada, Tristan Tzara, are soft-soap-shallowed through a coming parody of Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest* (not, sorry, *not*, you know, the other play).

In fact, it's only Westerner Henry Lyons who seems out of place in the Happono-Famisono chorus line, striding solemnly across the pages of history-as-fiction that happened while Jayne, Tama, Henry Carr — Henry Carr? well, yes, we're coming in late — Henry Carr et al. mix high kicks and waka tunes with verbal grooves and patter of a most elegant kind and come up with an utterly new theatrical cocktail of *Shi* Singapur! lively on the top, foot-pushing a mind-awakening and euphoric mood.

However, there has been enough said by Bob Hill about the play for me to be able to concentrate on the Perth production. At its centre (the eye of the comic storm, the bottom of the whirlpool of words) is Edgar Allan Poe, who plays both (and in some) the ageing Henry Carr, whose remarkable memories of golden wartime years are blessedly recalled. There are also matrix for the action of the play, and the young Henry Carr, main protagonist of official and amateur actors, a dilettante and clearly a bit of a waste for well-trained (trained as appropriate) actors of phrase. Most of us prefer both ways. But in the simplest thing is a star-quality actor as there is Perth and I can think of no one else who could have handled this demanding role with more aplomb. His excellent performance was complemented by that of Robert van Marckenborg playing the quickly perceptive of random poetry, the prince of the "last-up" creators, Tamas Tamas. (I wonder, though, whether Marckenborg's facility in French accents have led to misreading — he's been doing his che's and swindling his as for three roles in succession now — from Shakespeare to Mander to Tamas.)

Gerald Hitchcock played a typically manic Joyce given to bursts of uncharacteristic timidity and bursts of Danish exuberance. He and Michaela Berg participated in one of the high points of the evening, a scene in which Joyce confesses Tamsin on the origins of *Dada*. The writing and control in this scene were faultless, but the scene cannot be said of the ensemble work throughout the production. They play demands crisscross of attack, and it seemed here the scoring pace of the opening (pop, bang, pop, stop) that we were going to get it. But, as the performance went on, the pace faltered (bombs, bubble, plunk, closed (sparks, flicks) to a dead stop (thump), stirred (travels), recovered itself (boom, bang) in time for a nicely choreographed curtain call (pop-pops) and well-deserved applause (clap, wheeee!).

The minor roles were generally well-handled. Ivan King's lugubrious butler "with radical sympathies" was a delightful cameo. Helen Hough and Judy Nunn in welcome return to Perth played Cecily and Cressida, the "assistants" of Leonie and Joyce respectively, and both delivered

their parts with a fine sense of comic timing. As Leonie and her wife, Geoff Roche and Merton Camberg gave honest and credible performances in two of the least satisfying roles.

Graham Mathias's son, dwelling on Henry Carr's elegant drawing room and a Jewish history was less well and generally effective, though I did find the elaborate business made of doling furniture to the strains of Bert's *Disenchantment* a little tedious, and wonder whether a spare set might not have spared (Oh dear!) saved us from this.

The faltering in crispness and pace mentioned earlier, I think, is held to the account of director John Milson, but rather in defiance of "settling in" than the actors must have early in the run of such a demanding piece I did feel, however, that there was an occasional looseness in the movement, which perhaps attests to Milson's undeniable talent for staging choreographed costumes. Being allowed a fraction too much latitude. Taken all in all, the Hole's *Transience* is a wonderful place to take your wife for a refreshing evening walk.

decorating the shelves. Not a single personal touch or relieving splash of colour enlivens the scene. The same impersonal quality runs through the production, and one has the feeling that nobody has dared to break the glossy veneer of the play and rummage around in the innards. On the other hand, a convenience here is provided by the programme note outlining the story of *Parasol* and presumably encouraging us to discover parallels in the relationship between Simon and his edison friend Jeff to be understood as that between the dead-alive Ambrosius and Parasol with his beating heart? The need is impetuous to beguile, but is it fool for thought?

The makeshift large-dweller, who attempt to batter down the stone wall of Simon's impermeability are chosen specimens selected from each field. There is Simon's friend Jeff, a boozey comic who is wonderfully stinko about Australianism, Simon's school-teacher brother Stephen, who is aggressively downbeat and metaphorically courts both death and failure, and then's strange Mr Wood, a study in schadenfreude, and Dave, a triumphantly awful student of the new generation, one to maintain a script writer who aims to transfer her charms from the friend to Simon in order to get her book published. In all this, as was the case in *Burley*, the figure of the estranged wife seems part of another, inner world, an intrusion and yet a reassurance.

It is perhaps significant that the most convincing of the men was Ian Scott as the student. The international style of misanthrope, blagging and studied unconscious transfers with effortless ease from one culture to another. With the other characters a specific Englishness is demanded that leaves the actors hanging between the twin dangers of parody and so-English relaxed naturalism. The exception here is Leslie Wright in the really bizarre part of the co-scholarship. However, being seen in a subway stockbroker is a previous production, one couldn't help wondering why he was not cast in the central part.

The women were less obviously disadvantaged. Leah Taylor made a splendidly selective Devina, who remained coolly glamorous regardless of whether her breasts were on show or elegantly covered, while Carole Skinner brought her usual intelligence and warmth in the part of the wife, though in some of the more humorous bits tended to sound hollow.

One is left in a quandary about the play. Were all these enthusiastic London critics seduced by a first-run cast and the far-farable Alan Bates, or is it really a very good play derived here by luckless producers? There were plenty of laughs, yes, but the stupidity of the characters lacked economy, and basically one felt only mildly interested in their problems. Has it come to us too late? Even the fact that we have seen both *The Department* and *A Handful of Friends* about the local taste must be the edge for us?

The only way to have at least a few of the questions answered is to go and see the play again later in the season.

## 'One had the feeling that nobody has dared to break the glossy veneer of the play and rummage around in the innards'

### OTHERWISE ENGAGED

#### MARILYN LUKE

*Different: Engaged* by Simon Gray. Playhouse, Perth. Opened 2 June. Director, Anne Newson. Deaths: Anna French, Simon French, Helena Miller, Dave, Ian Scott, Stephen French, Alan Coward, Jack Gilling, Ian Woods, Devina Skinner, Leah Taylor, Wood, Leslie Wright, Ruth Carole Skinner.

*Different: Engaged*, long-awaited winner of critical accolades, turned out to be a disappointment.

The mechanics of *Burley* have been reversed, instead of a central character lacerating everybody within reach and thus triggering the action, we have a central character passive and phony as a water-bomb. His cousin hits ripples of reaction by means of comic and quirky pederasty as conversation, but really he is the butt of other people's anger, fears and frustrations because he is so blantly passive he creates an emotional vacuum which must be filled with the peevish feelings of all who come in contact with

him. As a device it is totally disconcerting and we have tuned in to the nature of the relationship that are gradually unmasked.

Simon, a publisher is clearly successful, and at first glances even happily married. He has planned a celebratory day of rest (intending to be seen recording of *Parasol* (even switching the phone over to answering-machine). He spends the entire two acts of the play being interrupted by a colourful assortment of antagonists, and it is their reactions to Simon that gradually create the figure of Simon for us. Even so, at the end we are still left with no images, and have the choice of regarding him either as a switched-off figure or from reality, or a disquieting sight who manages to transcend the world of human feelings.

The part of Simon needs an actor who can suggest hidden strength, even some threatening anger that is released in one or two unengaged and superficially trivial gestures. Dennis Miller is not a happy choice for the part. His style of humour is not of sympathy with the stonish quietness of Simon — one is constantly aware of the actor jelling his own style without having successfully mastered the unfamiliar mode. The dialogue ought to be crisp and flip, ball thrown away — Coward with an Oxfordshire collocation — but here it is delivered tentatively, with excessive pauses it might be T.S. Eliot.

There is throughout the production a feeling of being at a loss, which extends to the visuals of Anna French's art. The tedious three-piece lounge setting is straight out of the TV commercials for the workingman's upper-burgers. No publisher would be seen dressed like, certainly not one who intends to *Parasol* it's clearly missed, as are the even-rare books.



Joan Watson as Joan, Frank Williamson as Jack

## 'Williamson is writing better than ever'

THE CLUB

GABRIEL HILL-JOHNSON

*The Club* by David Williamson. Melbourne Theatre Company. Russell Gurnea Theatre, Melbourne. Closed 24 May 1977. Director: Rodney Fisher. Designers: Simon Gordon. Text: Frank Gallagher. Cast: Gerard Maguire, Laurie, Tyrone, Suzanne Dixon, Blanche Hughes, Joan, Frank, Wilson, Geoff, John, Brian.

A brave man goes to the football and barrels severely in the middle of a pack of opposition supporters. A brave playwright writes a play about a club with a long, honorable and sensitive history and gets it staged in Melbourne. The football is Australian Rules, the writer is David Williamson, and *The Club* is perhaps the Collingwood Football Club, more or less.

Football supporters, fortunately, are not one of the more obvious components of a theatre audience, especially those closely

associated with playing, and when entering the Victorian Football League clubs. If they were, the occasion would be rich for more participation. The football stories that Williamson has used are fairly well known, and the characters on which he has based them are as well. The real people, and what happened to them are about as legendary as you can get, but given the sensitive nature of some of their deeds it's best not to name them.

However, the legends of the game that Williamson has chosen have got away beyond even reality, more dense. They are the sorts of things well stored in the football museum, both here and overseas. Locally, one thinks of Hoggood's *And The Big Men Fly* and Gidley's *A Salute to the Great McCarty*, which used the metaphor of the boy from the bush who kicks bags of wheat 50 yards, and what happens to him in the complex city. There are other stories, of course, the stuff of conversation in the pub about statistical facts, heroes, deeds, rugged moments, games written by the Great Playwright in the Sky. Impossible memories that cannot possibly work on the stage, perhaps because in their original performance and in current remembrance they were on stage the waking-man's stage.

In the theatre, for an audience that Williamson has obtained even traces in

the last seven years, and which he knows better than any other person writing in Australia, is football it is a good place to hang his traditional concerns for the way relationships work inside institutions, whether they be a party, a college, a marriage or a club. As he knows quite well, the changes and methods and subject matter are quite dissimilar in any of those institutions.

In *The Club*, while it is similar to the Collingwood Club, with bits of Richmond, North Melbourne and Carlton thrown in, and while the discussions are recognisable to the cognoscenti, is not a play about football. It is not David Maizey's *The Changing Room* transferred to the Anzac. This is a disappointment to the fans, who will miss the real tragedy and drama of the game. This kind of play is yet to be written, like a story means that *The Club* will be able to play for long seasons in places where the Australian Rules game is like the Black Death.

The narrative is concerned with the coach of a club who has had little success in the past few years — got to the finals, but couldn't go on with it, lost the past five games. Laurie, the coach, has landed in his resignation over a full dispute with the president. The president, of the reformist kind, seems to be interfering with the team selection and expending money to

out Lewis. There are other snakes in the grass. Gerry, the well-paid administrator is all things to all men, and has a plan which doesn't involve many of the people currently at ease. That's Jack, who has played the most games, won a few prizefights as coach, and while going on in years, still sucks his teeth into everything. He has a few schemes going too. What really got on the coach's goat, though, was the buying of a \$60,000 recruit from Tasmania. Coach thinks he could have done better business, although the lad has lots of talent, he's not trying. The other players resent him. He's scored half the team. He spent one game watching a couple while the ball passed him by. And there's the captain, who is looking at the coach, threatening a strike.

Loss of sympathies. Everyone is scheming. It's a bit like *The Avengers* or *Freddie*, except that the coach, the recruit and the captain hardly get their act together to try to beat the mechanisms of the others by getting the stick off the bottom of the ladder.

What it's really about, though, is a small bureaucracy and how it works: the shifting fortunes, lies, statements, hypocrisies, acts of principle, insidious, back-stabbings, all mingled together most carefully in the famous play. Williamson has written for some time. Nobody is what they seem.

The Melbourne Theatre Company production, directed by Rodney Fisher with Frank Gillies as the president, Gerard Maguire as the administrator, Terence Donohue as the coach, Harold Hopkins as the captain, Frank Wilson as the old player, and John Walton as the recruit, is a bit under-rehearsed and slow but the basis for it is there.

One didn't get the feel of a football club very much, and perhaps the casting might have been more physically true to type, but the night was as enjoyable a night as I've had at Russell Street in some time. I think the public will like the play, too. *The Club* touches enough areas of concern for the Williamson audience, and is funny enough to run. Good luck to him! He's got his territory clearly mapped out and he's writing better than ever.

**'Real words from  
real people,  
convincingly  
performed'**

**YESTERDAY'S NEWS**

**GABRIEL HUTCHINGS**

*Yesterday's News* by Jeremy Sealwood and the Joint Stock Theatre Group. Australian Performing Group, Pura Pura, Carlton, Victoria. Opened 20 April 1977. Director, Wilfred Last. Roles: John Long, Pickles, Sarah Foster, Richard Margalit, Gail, David Porter, Rache.



John Long as Pickles

Frank Wilson, Jeremy Sealwood, Harold Hopkins, Terence Donohue, Gerard Maguire, Frank Gillies, John Walton

Necessary is one of the most pyrotechnic words that can be applied to a person or deed. To be necessary is not only to be successful in money, but to do something merely for money. The implication is that one likes to do anything for money, however grubby. Doing something for money against men will on the other hand, is not necessary. Like working. Killing for money is certainly necessary, and in most cases immoral as well. Mercenaries, however often used in the defence of one's country, say, are not well liked. There is the idea that a country is only worth defending if you do it yourself.

Going to fight for a cause, however, if you agree with it, is not necessarily necessary. The Spanish Civil War, for instance. Going off there was an act of faith, courage, idealism etc. Going paid was the least of it. If payment ever came into it, Mercenaries, in general, fight for causes they don't agree with. People who fight for causes they do agree with may get paid, but they fight for other motives. Angola, for instance. Many fought, but few were called mercenaries. Cuban, for instance.

Those who were recruited from England at mercenaries for Angola have been treated as scum. The old Colonel Collins has joined the growing pandemonium of 20th-century monsters.

But what of the men themselves? Are they "professionals", army men, staged, impostors, what? Where do they come from? What did their parents say? Who were their friends? What do their acts mean to the rest of the world? The Joint Stock play, *Yesterday's News*, as performed by the APG, is about all these things, and more — yet is so simply conceived and performed that it's like having a conversation (or monologue) with one in a pub.

Seven people are seated in a row in front of an audience. They, with one pair of exceptions, do not talk to each other. They speak to us. There's a machinker, who is questioned in a merely "practical" way with the "implications" of Angola, its economic plight. There's the English end of the recruitment process, a professional who knows everything about weapons, fighting, survival. There's a couple of British army graduates, born in Northern Ireland, went in as boy soldiers, got caught up in making the first brutal. There's a woman journalist, covering the human-interest angle of a returning mercenary and family. There's the girlfriend of a recruit and her and his background. There's a young kid, naive, silly. They tell us their names.

The seven of them take it in turns to talk, to explain themselves. What they say is an edited transcript of what they did say to Jeremy Sealwood, and the Joint Stock Company in England. Real words from real people, convincingly performed.

It is the old, the performance is about what life is like for these people, people like them. On the most violent images are not those of killing, but of the soldier's love for his weapons, where the professional describes what he knows about arms manufacturing, the journalist doing her professional thing by going after a story. It has the power of direct speech, of the truth as they see it. I don't think you get any closer to the truth of their motivation, the psychology of the mercenary, how could you when these people are presented as not unhappy with their lot, as survivors of various experiences?

*Yesterday's News*, in its simplicity and simplicity, is one of the best things the APG has done for quite a while. It is so easily done by Wilfred Last and shyly performed.

# The artist as victim of society

THE INTERVIEW  
THE GREAT OSCAR WILDE TRIAL

SUZANNE SPUNNER

Two Plays by Barry Dickson. La Mama Theatre, Carlton Victoria. Opened 26 May 1977.

The Interview, Doctor, Lee Lacer, Lawrence, Howard Stanley, Barry Dickson, Barry McElduff.  
The Great Oscar Wilde Trial, Doctor, Peter Green, Oscar Wilde, Ross Davis, Prosecuting Attorney, Mike Hancock.

Melbourne writer and artist Barry Dickson has written two short plays which could be re-titled "A Portrait of The Artist Presented by Society".

In *The Interview* a straight three-piece suit man interviews a stuffy, gem-clad roll-poor-own "queer artist", Barry Dickson — in wit, the author. The interviewer (Howard Stanley) is seated deliberately behind a vast executive desk littered with the paraphernalia of a busy man, while the interviewee (Barry McElduff) commands a lonely chair and the yawning doom at front of the desk. On the wall behind the interviewer there is a large Australian flag and a pugnacious picture of our leader, Malcolm Fraser.

From the first appearance, Howard Stanley is a study in perpetual motion of

the neurotic expressive man, a sort of Woody-Alice gamin who manically charades penals, light cigarettes, pipe gifts, and looks frantically through his papers. When he finally addresses the interviewee, he invents some a disbar on the way of such points despite artist Widgeon as Mr Dickson, or was it Mr Frickson? Throughout this blundering attack on his delicate sensibilities Mr Dickson/Frickson/et al remains unmoved and unresponsive.

The interviewer's meandering frenzy is punctuated by a succession of garbled, amplified phone-calls from Head Office threatening him with banishment to the firm's branch in Ballina. Ironically, though for no apparent reason one way of atonement, the interviewer falls dramatically from his chair and dies. With the characteristic self-focus of society to the artist, this event passes almost unnoticed by the interviewer, however, soon after, he too takes his leave and shoots himself, perhaps subconsciously realising that with Mr Dickson's demise, light had gone out in the world.

The tightly enclosed heterosexual world of *The Interview* is reminiscent of *Woman's The Louse*, but the strength of *The Louse* is the counterpoint provided by the poet against whom we can measure the sadistic cruelty of the lawyer. In *The Interview* there is no such balance, since the interviewee (Barry Dickson, never speaks except in the "text" Barry Dickson wrote the play. A clever conceit, but one that finally sabotages the play, since the ar-

tal never shows his cards, nor brings the phobic interviewee into his. The director, Lee Lacer, set the play up completely as a *fait accompli*, the interviewee was so crazed and the artist so passive from the beginning that there was very little room for movement.

*The Great Oscar Wilde Trial* was more successful and argued, less self-conscious and content to amuse gently. The loose parameters of the play were the whiffy trial which Wilde endured in 1855 and which sent him to prison for two years with hard labour for homosexual practices. The legalistic formality of an Old Bailey trial becomes the excuse for a lively and witty exposure into the idea of exposure of defining obscenity (sexual behaviour).

The specific charge laid at Wilde's feet by the final-minded businessmen of consorting with a young handsome. The range of moral questions considered includes, kindness to animals, and the winning qualities of handiwork over pornography. Ultimately, a never stated, is the tragedy of Wilde's treatment is evoked and we are gambled in a Wildean *Requiem*. Potter while pondering whether, if Jack is buried in the country, is he a handsome-about-town, in the city?

Under Peter Green's direction, both the only prevailing control (Mike Hancock) and Wilde (Ross Davis) give precise and amusing performances that are beautifully paced and elegantly understated. The play is a delightful track in words by barrister and poet.

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WRITE TO US FOR A COMPLETE LIST OF DANCE BOOKS



**'Provocative plays  
by playwrights not  
ready to accept  
the old ways as  
the only ways'**

**I SAT WITH MY LOVE  
THE CRIPPLE PLAY  
HUNTING  
GLITTER**

**BARLE MCKENDRY**

*I Sat with my Love* by Barbara Eric, Adelaide Theatre Group, Adelaide Theatre, Adelaide. Opened May 1977. Director, Helen Cunningham. Design, Greg and Sue Rogers. Stage manager, Jane Henderson.

Lead, Ann Hall, Laurence, Laura Semmens, Vic, Michael Lister, Ross, Pat Kelly, Noel, Margaret Jones, Judge, Sue Woods, Secretary,

Mark Lawrence, Ripon, Peter Commercial, Traveller, Rado, Labrish and Christiana Toss. *The Cripple Play* by Max Richards, Adelaide Theatre Group, Adelaide Theatre, Adelaide. Opened May 1977. Director, Helen Cunningham.

*Cripples in Camberland* (opening), by Veronica Semmens, Adelaide Theatre Group, Adelaide Theatre, Adelaide. Opened 2 June 1977. Director, Martin Chikman, set design, Robert Brown, costume design, Jonathan Smith, lighting design, Ian Lyons.

*Adip* by Ian David Mangan, Rector, Mike, John, Helen.

*Glitter* by Peter Mangan, ABCE and ACE. The house, Adelaide. Opened 2 June 1977. Director, Martin Chikman, set design, Robert Brown, costume design, Jonathan Smith, lighting design, Ian Lyons.

*Red Sun*, Michael Chiswell, Blue Daughter, Quinn, Breckley, Conway, Blue King, Lynn, Marston, Blue Quinn, James Roberts, Dr, Gary Apple, Sgt, Veronica Scott, Janet, Michael Ross, Joan Quinn, Eleanor Boyd, First Priest, Chris Lundquist, Second Priest, Nelson Mangan, Third Priest, Mark Mangan, Rector, Pam Richardson, Red Quinn, Zippo Ross, Robert Fowler, Blue Quinn, Elaine Gidding, John McQuinn, Red Pope, Helen Mackintosh, Blue Pope, Denise Stephens.

Four plays by two of Adelaide's more prolific theatre groups, South Australia Creative Workshops performing *Hunting and Glitter* at the Festival Centre's underground Space and the Adelaide Theatre Group presenting *The Cripple Play* and *I Sat With My Love* in the Serfite Theatre, a converted house by the park. Though the geography was different, each play caused its space. Both evenings provoked the audience with a bit of the goods, they were provoked to think a little, see a lot and hear what they chose to pick up.

One is reminded, on seeing the plays, at the differences of approach and how open to the playwright, from nothing a situation can be made, if there is no situation what does it become? An idea? An abstraction? It was interesting to watch the audience, there were those who for moments were suspended in a sort of empathy and others who were worried by what was being fed to them. Asked to react through imagination, unfamiliar, open years that just didn't come together, and taken to figures just non-conforming, the



playgoer has to be oriented to several things.

A play that asks questions by questioning truths, Barbara Cline's *I Saw with my Love* has women playing men and men playing women. Geographically we are shown the travesties of role-playing. The on-model world is exposed, the husband in subducing is typically ambitious, the story unfolds in short scenes, films, almost documentary in style. An effective strength-making piece of theatre, its strength lies in paradox. Created by Helen Cunningham, with a strong cast, light in an appropriate form, *I Saw with my Love* saw actors involved with their roles. With the on-stage comes a certain distance from the work and when presented with a supposedly small audience, for example the wife's attempt at gassing herself, it must always be short of believable and somewhere nearer graphic example. Barbara Cline's use of the stage and a good number of actors is a credit to her. Though you don't have to agree with the proportion of the problem, certainly men and women need a lot more eye-to-eye.

The first half of Max Cunningham's package in *The Cripple Play* by Max Richards. Written some years ago, the tale performed by De Chamberland is a controlled and winning manner, the play takes you in to the very small world of a 50-year-old woman crippled in youth and bound to a wheelchair. It paints her realism as it does her gentleness, the grin angry with people refuses to go on a 'coppin' outag, recalls her love life, the stroke. Her mind is meane and sharp. She plays games with herself and the audience, as well as tricks on the wheelchair. There are moments during her performance when you wonder how far a girl, she's an actress, all her words and events are known. Who is she the cripple?

Over at the Space, the Association of Community Theatres has made possible a series of plays, the first of which are *Maning* by Veronica Swenson, and *Gitter* by Peter Murphy.

*Maning* is a play without a set, only light. It opens with a bang to reveal someone looking dead on stage who calls a halt to the action to apply further blood in the appropriate area. In this play of an idea, an illustration of a plot within a plot, an actor will call for aid from the director sitting at the audience, the stage moment is not a force. The couple, played by Julia Stokes and David Plummer, act out the hunter and the hunted. He shoots her by mistake — in fact, he doesn't bring down his great symbol, the deer. Another play of rules, of not-trying possibilities. At one point, as she's dying, the lights fade slowly. Julia Stokes never looked so good. Tight direction by Maria Christina made a difficult concept easier to accept.

The other play of the evenings by Melbourne playgoer Peter Murphy, was *Gitter*. Using 20 members of South Australian Creative Workshops, Maria Christina stages a piece of ritual theatre. Performed on a set that was too much an

afterthought to the play's concept, the actors depict winners and the ruled fate of many people. Here the moment is in language too big to suit the circumstance, bound by intent and cluttered by declarations. Often it seemed that the dialogue did not support the physicality.

Summing up a feast of provocative plays by playwrights not ready to accept the old ways as the only ways.

## Much more than just a good show by Ruth Cracknell

JUST RUTH

PETER WARD

*Just Ruth* by Ruth Cracknell, Alexander Buss, David Williamson. South Australian Theatre Company, Playhouse Adelaide (opened 3 May 1977). Director: Colin Gough; design: Robert Ford; lighting design: Nigel Leung; music: Michael Fuller; stage manager: Peter Martin; stage manager: Gabrielle Bridges. With: Ruth Cracknell, Sybil Graham, Michael Fuller.

*Just Ruth* was just Ruth Cracknell, contraptions or dislocations, doing that most personally demanding thing for a performer: the one-person show. She was not entirely alone in this venture, however. To one side was Sybil Graham, at the piano, giving a kind of on-stage piano-bar performance, and generally round about was Michael Fuller the actor, who played her, somewhat and an occasional extra. Then there was Rodney Ford's on a small platform, a programme decorated with big show-bar paper roses, and all surrounded by an immense stretched-out construction focusing in on, and framing, Ruth, plus the lighting plot, the props, and the music. But after all was said, sung, carried, lit up and done, there was just Ruth.

She made a slightly hesitant start — it was a kind of testing the air for the audience's mood — before she took the collective hand and led it through one of the happiest nights at the theatre it has been at, at least this member's pleasure to have for years.

I was, in fact, a little transported — back to the days, 20-odd years ago, when she was performing in Sydney's Philip Street Theatre. The single-person sketch, the monologue, Sybil Graham indeed at the piano, and that sense of tension, offbeat whimsy and comment that made review at times the stuff of theatrical art, and nearly always in that theatre at least, a very good show.

And *Just Ruth*, at Adelaide's Playhouse was more than just a good show. Fringe, as a vehicle for Ruth Cracknell's considerable review talent, it was, good. She is a personality actor, a character in her own right, a voice, a style, a tragicomic sense, a delicious ambiguity, and someone with a sense of the high-ramp of it all. Simply, at that level, given the right material, some-

thing good was bound to happen.

But then someone had the good sense — it was probably director Colin Gough — to go two steps further. The first step was the inspired choice of Sybil Graham as the musical accompanist, whom when a little more is said, and the second was to commission four "songs" written to write pieces for the show. Michael Clegg, Peter Vekich, David Williamson, and Alex Buss. Michael Clegg's and Peter Vekich's pieces for some complained reasons did not make it, but David Williamson's was there with two pieces. *After Harriet Lane*, *Down the Lane* and *Lady with the Flattery Eyes*, while Alexander Buss contributed *Folly*, *Melrose Clocks Out*. The third writer-developer was Ruth Cracknell herself. She contributed some pieces and drew amazingly and something about seven material wrong it, and the lightness of touch in flight some of the comic response.

In terms of the writing, then, it was David Williamson's piece *Lady With the Flattery Eyes* that brought the production to the stage of fine art, touching the performer of perfect lightly and playfully, not sufficiently strongly to break the mood, but enough to give dimension and substance to the piece and I, and thus the production as a whole.

The piece is a monologue in which a woman begins to explain to her doctor that she has a minor ailment and ends by confessing that she has murdered her husband. It is an intimately witnessed piece of writing of such psychological astuteness that it left the audience generally bemused, and let me say practicing and teaching psychiatrist to ask if it would be possible for the performance to be made a target for his classes.

So much for the drama of the night, achieved as it was with taste and discretion. For the rest, the fare was more solidly part of the ordinary traditions of post-war review, performed and illuminated by the lessons that have been learned in cinema and light theatre over the past 25 to 30 years.

The night opened with one of the old weapons, a number of choruses gaining her hand claps in a pot. There follows a more pungent piece, *Fake Migrants*, in which the lower-middle class, non-idealized, prejudiced and racist English migrant is subjected to one of the most viciously telling poems of Post-war-bashing that I think the Australian stage has ever. And about time, too. English migrants are as much part of the game in this area as we are ourselves.

The first half finished with one of the most brilliant pieces in the production, *Miss Celestine*. Sybil is decorated by an enormous picture-hat and she is the epitome of all the ladies you have ever seen at a South Yarra or Rose Bay luncheon restaurant. I think the sketch was an old Philip Street one, and it was appropriate, as the lady lurches from one discreet military crest to the next.

Other memorable moments in the fare were Williamson's *Miss Harriet*, the

archetypal sports mistress addressing a parents' meeting, an ancient cross lightbulb-walking in *Just George*, the oldest and most cynical Quaker in-brother in the business. Wanda, explaining all about the 747 you didn't need to leave, and Bruce a Vicky Madson, a 1930s women's journalist, who, in an abundant piece on sales reporting as an occupation she finds she has concentrated herself. It was not so successful as it could perhaps have been, or as relevant, a word Mr Colin George has historically endorsed a critic for using. But it's rare he would prefer us to that of the alternative performer.

That, possibly irrelevant soap aside, there are three other things that seem to me to be worth saying about this enjoyable production. Firstly and simply, what a pity it is that a parent, tired. Secondly, its general concern in Adelaide makes one wonder why the art of professional review, with its delicious blend of humour, satire and serious comment, has declined, at least in the English-speaking world. Is it, as Colin George suggests, that abroad theatre, in a sense, took its place? It didn't in Europe, traditions of review are still healthy and politically active on both sides of the Channel.

And thirdly, how much better could it have been had the tradition been maintained here and the techniques in writing and performance been thus further honed up and refined. It would have meant, for instance, that the delightful, precariously funny, and entirely attractive character who in Syd Greenham wouldn't have had to spend her life peering out Australian folk, but rather would have had some more relevant stuff to pour out here at home, whether the Fords thought it relevant or not.

## Much to admire, but lack of thrust in David Williamson's production

ALL MY SONS

MICHAEL MORLEY

*At Mr. Son by Arthur Miller. South Australia Theatre Company, Playhouse Theatre, Festival Centre, Adelaide. Opened 26 May 1977. Director, David Williamson; designer, John Cowdell; lighting design, Nigel Leverage; stage director, Peter Walker; stage manager, Peter Kainer.*

*Mr. Keller, Brian James, Kim Keller, Patricia Kennedy, Chris Keller, Ben Keller, John Bennett, Douglas, Arthur, George, David, Craig, Ashley, Dr Jim Bayless (Edwin Hoedeman), Sam Bayless, Daphne Galt, Frank Lacey, Linda Bayless, Lydia, Robert Russell.*

What should an Australian production of *All My Sons* in the 1970s, seek to set

before an audience? Can we respond to the tale of Joe Keller, who allowed faulty cylinder heads to be shipped out of his factory to the Air Force, and then manoeuvred his partner into taking the blame when the planes crashed? The play itself is intransigent from the world of the 1940s, with its antipathy of that pervasive disillusionment that sprang from post-war uncertainty, the alienation from family and society experienced by the soldier-from-the-front returning, whose restlessness and search for meaning new seems — in the wake of numerous popular and literary treatments of the same theme — particularly close to home? What is there in Miller's dramatic workmanship of his beloved theme of personal and public responsibility that will prompt the director and audience to respond? Theme, structure and characterisation make no attempt to criminal these local dependance on America, but what life the work out of the realm of sub-bourgeois pastiche, and how should a director tackle these questions?

Problems, problems and nowhere an answer in David Williamson's production or, rather, set the answer and would a spirit from a thought-through view of the play. The direction seems ambient, and it turns positively allegory: there is some quite unforgivable cracking in the second act which nobody seemed interested in correcting. Yet Williamson must have had some purpose in choosing the play, unless the audience was to receive nothing more than an experience akin to the usual of admission and satisfaction one has at the sight and sound of a smooth-running vintage Rolls-Royce, or at the colour and noise of a glass of vintage port. Not, of course, satisfaction to be derived at that hardly complex.

Yet, given the lack of thrust in the production, given the lack of any sense of a director seeking the strengths and weaknesses of the text, there is much to admire in the performance. Patricia Kennedy, in particular, is outstanding. As Kate Keller from the moment she came on, the atmosphere hovered, the relationships started to come into form, the world of the Keller began to seem both real and relevant. Even when Miller's line, as at their most revealing — as in the final speech addressed to Chris — "Don't dare! Don't take it on yourself! Forget now! Live!" — the great first point, missing weight. Although the character because of Miller's writing, becomes less interesting as the play progresses, she held the attention throughout. Yet never was there the feeling that she was overplaying, begging the centre stage, pushing the other characters to the edges of the drama. Rarely the best performance I've seen from an Australian actress, and we can only hope that Adelaide will get more opportunities to see her — soon.

Not of her performance was the most notable, she was well supported by the other members of the Keller family. Brian James (of whom I have in the past been sharply critical) was far happier and much more persuasive as Joe, the middle-aged

businessman, who can justify the larger concern in terms of personal concern for the family unit. It was a characterisation in a similar vein to his recent appearance on a *Melodrama* episode, and on the evidence of both, he is better suited to such roles than to either Chekhov or Brecht. At times, his authority as of the genre, may variety rather than that false grandeur which is the businessman's stock-in-trade, he nevertheless made for a convincing, and in the final moments, moving figure. And in the scene when he confronts George, the lawyer son of the man he has ruined, and reveals the young man's nervousness back in his face while doing a highest job on his former partner, he is precisely the right sort of concerned and single-minded self-indulgence. With just a little more attention, the quality, so crucial to Miller's view of Joe, could have been obliquely suggested throughout the performance.

Although Kit Taylor, as the returned soldier who finally manages to ask the question "What did you do during the war Daddy?", was occasionally naive and uncertain, there was still much to commend in his approach to a character whose insight into strong armour patterns might have become drag and unconvincing. He effectively conveyed of the pain and uncertainty in his approach to Ann, and the scenes with Joe moved well from guarded affection to acute and reprehensible bewilderment. Excellent support also from the admirable Edwin Hoedeman as Jim Bayless, giving a beautiful demonstration of how to underact without becoming flatness or understating, and from a very well-controlled Daphne Galt as his wife. Displaying a good understanding of how to deliver her edge lines without integrating them, she made the character a great deal funnier, more interesting and more credible than she appears on the page.

Bareilly Vorens was precise and colourless as Ann and Craig Ashley seemed to think that Miller's stage direction "moving" (of George Bennett) meant that he should peel round the stage like a perambulating case of hyper-activity. The set was the now-familiar garish mistake. Looking like an eighteenth-century Englishman's voice of a wilderness, it offered an unnecessary halfway, floating wooden shutters, a symbolic tree that resembled nothing so much as a splintered wooden pole surrounded by a mosaic mosaic, the whole flamed by curved, arching paws. The effect was like viewing the stage through a fish eye lens, so dumb significant for those who don't suffer from vertigo or dizziness, and, usually, incomprehensibly perfidious.

The strength of this *All My Sons* is in the performance, and perhaps — to provide a partial answer to the opening questions — in that the play will have to offer the right of action working hard and, for the most part, to good effect, with less and characters who are still sufficiently well-crafted and well-motivated to strike several chords even in those who have become suspicious of the well-made play.

## What do you do when your theatre blows away? Richard Creswick reports

### DARWIN STAGES A REVIVAL

Amateur theatre is alive and well in Darwin, although not without its difficulties. The two amateur theatrical groups in Darwin before the cyclone still exist and have been active since the disaster, but both face problems with their theatres.

Carveragh Theatre Incorporated suffered worst at the hands of Tracy because its old, fireproof-satisfactory corrugated-iron building was all but demolished. Left with a lot of floorboards and the partly clad steel frame of its proscenium-arch stage, the company bravely borrowed back to present the first post-cyclone live theatre performance — Richard Gordon's *Doctor in Love*, in what is billed as an "open-air" performance.

The dry season weather of May 1975 and the shortage of entertainment in the still devastated city created the success of the production. However, remaining problems associated with lighting, audience safety and theatre security soon put paid to hopes of staging further productions.

Theatre security was, in fact, a major problem even during the run of *Doctor in Love* because a tarpaulin stretched across the front of the stage was all that "locked" the theatre and it proved no deterrent to vandals who, on at least one occasion, entered the theatre and damaged the set with an axe. When spectators, desperate for housing, moved into the theatre's shell and the "two" descended, the Carveragh Group switched to theatre replacement and staged a very successful run at Jack Hebbard's *Dumbbells*.

Although the group's earlier performances of *Dumbbells* were marred by poor timing, attendance and perhaps inadequate attention to the money, it became eventually a profitable and worthwhile production that brought an entirely new type of theatre to Darwin. The combination of theatre with dancing, food and drinks seemed ideal for Darwin, where people are not among the most enthusiastic of theatregoers even at the best of times. In fact, so good was the public response that the group staged an extended season of private showings at such places as the Darwin Hospital and the Navy Base. It also played to enthusiastic audiences in a three-performance season at Nhilukway, the mining town on the Gove Peninsula. This success prompted the Carveragh Group to present the follow-up Hebbard play, *Goodbye Ted*, which, despite some timing snafus, was less successful than *Dumbbells*. Now the Carveragh Theatre Group is considering doing *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll*, which is undergoing a revival of interest.

The group is also exploring means of getting a new theatre, but that, in itself, is a dismal enough prospect given the group's limited finances, the present economic climate and the present Federal Government's ambiguous attitude to the arts.

The story for Darwin's other amateur group, the Darwin Theatre Group, has been one of better fortune, although still not without its difficulties.

DTG operates out of a stone building, Brown's Mart, which, as the name implies, is a former shopping emporium, and has also been service as a job at station. Brown's Mart is administered by a board of trustees and is rated a historical building by the National Trust.

Although untouched in the cyclone, it remained structurally sound and there were most and effective means to have it rebuilt. While the work of rebuilding and strengthening the Mart to cyclone-proof standards was going on, the Theatre Group pushed through a relatively quiet time theatrically, concentrating on street theatre and outdoor performances, including an interesting garden version of *Twelfth Night*.

Samson Hepburn was brought to Darwin later in 1975 to work (with the help of local actors) and then produce a play which, not surprisingly, turned out to be loosely based on the bureaucratic bigness and red tape that surrounded the early stages of Darwin's post-cyclone reconstruction. The play was called *Grouped* and was performed to enthusiastic audiences in the open-air amphitheatre of the YMCA in Darwin. Hepburn said the DTG scored a hit with *Grouped* because so many Darwin people knew the frustrations of the central character in the play.

The reopening of Brown's Mart last year led to a revival of live theatre, with DTG staging a revival — again loosely based on post-cyclone events — then a production of Rita Power's *Land of the Anziesians*, which drew wide critical acclaim for the cast and the producer, Darwin barrister Tim Pashley.

And it was then that DTG met real problems. The cost of re-roofing the Mart and installing the air-conditioning that's almost obligatory for Darwin, left the trustees without enough money to provide proper seating. Para-military officers, pressing the need for food storage and other safety features, refused approval for a licence for live performances. A family-run group selling staff friends at Brown's Mart was formed and a new way on the way to raising the \$15,000 needed to bring the building up to scratch. But, until the work is done, Brown's Mart is out.

However, what could have been a major setback for amateur theatre in Darwin became a triumph with the opening of the new Christ Church Cathedral, also built to replace a historic building destroyed by the cyclone.

The original Christ Church Cathedral was a small stone church and its demolition needed to be an Australia-wide fundraising campaign for the construction of a spectacular neo-gothic-and-wood structure. The new cathedral, rising stark but imposing from the site of the original building, was consecrated in March in the presence of the Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr Donald Coggan. As part of the consecration ceremonies, the Anglican Church asked the Darwin Theatre Group to present a production in the cathedral. A venue so hallowed, the result was the group's last and most ambitious production, Robert Bolt's *A Man for All Seasons*.

Finding experienced actors to fill the older male roles was not easy, but, to his credit, producer Ted Whitaker, put together one of the best-produced plays performed by amateurs in Darwin.

A variety of rising on-stage apprentices for DTG. Whitaker is relatively new to production but he brought to the position boundless energy and enthusiasm, as well as an unshakable belief in the importance of his own decisions.

Self-confidence inevitably causes some inter-production conflicts and it happened with *A Man for All Seasons*, leading eventually to the resignation of the set designer and the play's producers manager.

There were other problems too. Because the cathedral was still in the construction stage when rehearsals began, the set had to be constructed in Brown's Mart and moved to the cathedral later. In fact, the move took place only two days before the production began and the final dress rehearsal was delayed and after spent by other activities associated with the cathedral's consecration and opening. Despite this, the play was presented to capacity audiences in a six-night public season.

Such problems haven't been uncommon in Darwin's amateur theatre world in the two years since Cyclone Tracy, but the fact that *A Man for All Seasons* was presented on time and with a minimum of problems in performance is a good reason for live theatre in Darwin.

Richard Creswick is an ABC journalist in Darwin, where he has lived for just over six years. Since coming to Darwin, he has been a member of both the Carveragh Theatre Group and the Darwin Theatre Group. He has acted in plays for both groups, most recently in Darwin in *Land of the Anziesians*.



## THE PEANUTS PROBLEM

### Can the Elizabethan Theatre Trust hit that elusive jackpot?



The headquarters of the Elizabethan Theatre Trust in Dawling Street, Sydney, has the feel of a place coming down in the world. The stock bars are empty, and in the board-room, looking north across Westmacott's to the harbour, the decorations are reduced to a bunch of ivy in a Schweppes beer bottle.

Jeffrey Jayston-Smith, the trust's general manager, is an exception to the impression of frugal shabbiness about the place. He's as spry as anyone can remember. It was he, the trust's head of theatrical promotions, Jeff Koval, and its publicity man, John Little, who asked Theatre Australia to talk about the eruption of criticism that followed the (arguably) biased Coopers and Lybrand report and the Peter O'Toole auction. The trust wanted an opportunity to present its case side by side with ours.

Robert Page and I represented Theatre Australia. We were disappointed by unexplained stipulations from Jayston-Smith that he would not discuss trust policy (that was for the board, he said) and that he would, in general, be willing to be quoted only on the trust's entrepreneurial role. It was a blow softened by a promise that emerged later in the afternoon that Theatre Australia will be given an interview when the Coopers and Lybrand management consultants' report is verified, and all the issues can be discussed and all questions about the trust answered.

But in any case, the entrepreneurial activities of the trust require immediate examination. The central recommendation

of the Coopers report is that business of the trust be pared, leaving it with only a national entrepreneurial role. Foreign loans and interstate tours. An examination of their trust's skills in that field is a first priority.

"It is not an aphorism or platitude in the world — it doesn't matter how often — it is important to bring it to the Australian public, if the quality is there," said Jayston-Smith. "And an endeavour to present Australian companies as widely as possible within the funds available, provided the quality is there."

But the trust has only peanuts to play with. In 1975 it allocated itself an entrepreneurial fund of \$44,000, but in 1976 this was cut to \$21,000. It is not much more than half the general managers' salary. Instead of allocating resources for the job the trust made the decision to save them, and in pursuit of cash in the last 12

months, it invested in three holiday shows, two Broadway shows, and the shows imported through the Sydney Theatre Royal — starting with *Dead End Decks* (Peter O'Toole) and continuing with *The Top of the Fourth* (Hiroshi), *The Perverse of the Company* (Douglas Fairbanks Jr) and *Amadeus* (Plácido Domingo).

To suggest now that the shows at the Theatre Royal were poor-quality goods, that they're damaged Australian lights internationally and that they've failed to make much money, the trust explains in much the way Jeff Koval did that afternoon: "There is the box-office potential — the potential is there to make \$10,000, \$40,000, \$50,000." The trust seems to have been hanging on a jackpot.

**Marr:** Does the trust believe it's free to raise its money any way it can?

**Jayston-Smith:** Yes, I think so. Subject to any qualifications we would like to make ourselves in the way we do it. I wouldn't suggest it could be used in a greyhound. But, provided it's within the general parameters of the arts world, it is.

**Marr:** Does the trust feel free to invest, even though the activities it becomes associated with are working contrary to what appear to be its own objectives?

**Jayston-Smith:** I would think the trust itself would have to determine whether it is going to be working contrary to its objectives, and if it is, I don't imagine that we wouldn't place a restriction on a consultant. Little. May I come on? By whose objectives? Who says what the objectives are?

### David Marr

DAVID MARR is an artistic graduate of Sydney University, where he was very active dramatically. Having decided not to pursue a legal career, he spent two years in Europe among theatre and literature. On his return he worked for three years on the *Observer* and joined and directed his first play, *It's over on the corner*, based on his own article in the *Saturday Evening Post*.



We were posing the problem of *Dead End Decks*. It has been exhaustively discussed in the press, but the trust's rationale for involvement in that ill-fortuned, unsuccessful venture remains at the heart of any public account, and the public



defense of the trust's entrepreneurial role. **Marr:** It seems hard to square the impact of shows such as *Dead End* (which won the development of indigenous theatre) **Jayson-Smith:** Possibly... yes, in that particular case... but on paper it had as much — let's call it "quality appeal" — as far as we were concerned as any of the activities from overseas: the Royal Shakespeare Company or anything else.

**Raval:** It has to be one of the best casts, on paper, that's ever been seen in Australia on stage at one time. The actual product did not live up to the people on stage. I don't think that can be entered.

**Jayson-Smith:** We certainly believed [O'Toole's standing in world theatre] was high when we arranged to do it. But I think that if that is considered to be a bad apple in the basket, and again that is a matter of opinion, I don't think the apple was anywhere near as bad by the time the show finished as possibly the time it opened. But going back, as I did this morning, over the shows we've done in the last seven years, I think that is really, by picking O'Toole the exception because it goes along with a not having critical acclaim.

**Marr:** Who from the Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust saw *Dead End* (which) performing in the provinces of England?

**Jayson-Smith:** Nobody.

**Marr:** Who from the trust read the script?

**Jayson-Smith:** Nobody.

**Marr:** Who from the trust employed an independent ratings agency to see what the reviews had been?

**Jayson-Smith:** Nobody... But I did say if there is any dissatisfaction with our current situation with *Dead End* (which), it

is that it is one of the worst decisions, I believe, where we haven't had the quality control which we've always believed in, viz. — being able to judge the product from the studio or the script or whatever it happens to be — and that we did not have that in the O'Toole situation. As agreed that the O'Toole situation was something where I had to make up my mind within two days, as did the board. It was just one of those odd things. Now, if it was a mistake, and we're just as capable of making mistakes as anybody else — I like to think we don't make too many — but if it was a mistake, it was a mistake. And I'm certainly not prepared to defend the board and hence what can be considered a mistake and that's a matter of opinion at the time.

**Raval:** I think the word mistake is being used too much. The public didn't necessarily think it was a mistake, the critics certainly did, but the public didn't. **Marr:** But the public did I mean, as a commercial undertaking it failed.

**Raval:** As a commercial undertaking, certainly, yes, you're right, it failed. But the public, that went to see it basically enjoyed the production very much.

**Marr:** You say this venture was a "force off"? Is there a policy now that such a venture won't be entered into again? Has a lesson been learned?

**Jayson-Smith:** If there is a lesson to be learned, quality. You must be able to check your quality, or to know that if comes from a quality studio. And that we did not have the opportunity to do, except we did get some overseas success as quickly as we could.

**Raval:** Which were good.

**Marr:** You didn't also get the critical slatberage from the English provinces did you?

**Raval:** We were given what we were told were the critics from the provinces where they'd played.

**Marr:** On a point of information, were those full clippings?

**Raval:** Absolutely, complete from beginning to end, which you can see.



The trust hasn't struck the jackpot with the Theatre Royal series, over the four productions it thinks it will come out "a bit up or a bit down". But the trust is ahead when you add up the results of commercial investment over the last seven years says Jayson-Smith. "We have not actually spent in the net, one dollar of government money on commercial investment. And that means has been used to pick up the losses on most of these other shows. It probably sounds like an accounting year one, but that's got to be done at some stage."

Any loss the trust shows on a quarterly investment, he points out, is limited by loss on O'Toole to put it slightly more than \$2,000. "At all times, we restrict the amount [of the entrepreneurial fund] which can be used up, the amount of loss which we can incur in a commercial investment."

But is there the trust won't publish these figures, which are about to go on the records for Jayson-Smith explained. "If Mr. Hooley makes a profit or a loss, that's his business, and the same with J.C. Williamson's, and therefore we have taken a little bit off, I think perhaps, someone that if we publish on our accounts which particular shows [of theirs] we lost money on as commercial investments and which we didn't, we are going along the information of the accounts of individuals or companies." The figures will be given, in confidence, only to the Australian Council. **Marr:** I've been fascinated by the trust's [ambivalent] attitude to having interests in other companies. I can't think of a better function for the trust than breaking down the patched barriers between city and games in Australia.

**Jayson-Smith:** Right. I support that.





but I went through our annual reports, which is the best way I can refresh my memory, to see the results of the interstate drama companies that we raised since we started the programme in 1970, and every one of them did not break even, every one of them lost money. So therefore I believe one cannot approach a court by an Australian drama company, on the basis that it's at least going to break even. Now, I'm not suggesting for a moment that we shouldn't still keep bringing them, because we're doing it, and we've got *Tamworth Tamworth* at the moment going into Melbourne and Brisbane. But you do it with the knowledge, surely the financial knowledge, that you are not going to break even at the best.

**Mare:** Can these tours be purposefully discussed in terms of "breaking even", in terms of cash? Aren't we getting right to the heart of what subsidised theatrical enterprise is all, and isn't that precisely the nature of something like the trust?

**Joynton-Smith:** Yes.

**Mare:** Well, now, surely you can point to a great success, a tour of *Red Shoes* to Sydney, even if a lesser success?

**Joynton-Smith:** Yes, certainly.

**Karel:** But this is the very point why we say we must have other involvements because our involvements in more commercial theatre will enable us to do that more and more. But you can only lose so much money on an interstate company, and then the money runs out. So you can't do any more, because you haven't got any more.

**Papa:** We are concerned with your public image in Australia. Your public image at the moment looks to me rather bad and we're trying to discover why it is bad. We think it's because you bring in overseas shows on the ground that there's then supposed to be money for indigenous shows, but when the figures come out you're a little up or a little down. It hasn't happened. **Karel:** Just a second. I think, in lieu of we go back over our figures, our involvement has in fact shown profits over the past years. You're making three answers at the moment.



It's an aspect of what might be called the greatest problem the trust still has: a national mission but allocated peanuts to realise it. A confusion of attitudes is thus probably unavoidable: with one set of principles in place (as Australian theatre, and a theatre (frequently contradictory) set to raise the cash to do it. The way out of the bind is for the trust to bid a commercial jackpot — but the jackpot never seems to come.

If the Elizabethan Trust becomes the nation's official enterprise, it will have as a guiding principle of the business (in graphics on the walls of their new and inevitably more modest offices) "Bake your own". There is no limit on the love the trust associates an interrelated, non-commercial tour at the moment. The trust has never broken even. It is very cautious.

Joynton-Smith is in fundamental disagreement with Wayne Morley (see Morley's article in the June issue of *Theatre Australia*) over the prospects of taking critical and commercial loss from subsidised theatre and turning them successfully. You must bake your own, says the trust, give publicity and marketing a chance, wait for theatres that are just right for the show. The trust has turned down many possibilities to follow this principle, and a right to right, but in seven years it hasn't broken even on an interstate production.

In private, others at the trust wonder if an interrelated tour work within the structure of committees and boards imposed in Douglas Simon, and lately the trust has not had much success securing the prizes it has been after. It lost Gordon Chesser and Benjamin Franklin to Wilson Morley, yet, aggravating as it is for the trust, Morley appears to have got Chesser on just about all terms the trust was fighting the National for.



By a series of internal organisations the administration of the Playwright's Conference came under the trust's entrepreneurial budget. No longer. In a general administrative budget of \$250,000 there was not the money to help them any longer and they were axed this year. **Joynton-Smith:** I spoke to Jacques Kott and said, "Well, look, if you're interested in subsidising this sort of problem, I'm sure we can find a subsidy/phone downstairs where you can bring your files in and get a filing-cabinet and if you want, someone to do your minutes of meetings and that sort of thing and send them out."

"...and they away we went. And ultimately we finished up by the time of the last conference, it was one person literally full-time downstairs for at least four months of the year, just asking for an assistant. In the end it was just not possible."

A small but highly significant boost to the nation's theatre was cut off, measurably. In its three original decades of policy often as hard to understand, and frequently as damaging to the public image of the trust, that *Theatre Australia* will examine in a second interview with the trust. With the results of the Cooper and Lybrand report known, the trust will be in a position to say where it goes now after these (as Jeff Karel calls them) two "interim years" since it lost the agents and balls.



B

## Giselle saves the season

'Never has the feel and smell of classic French ballet been so real'



Marlene Brown/Giselle

For some people this year's Sydney season of the Australian Ballet has been a disappointment.

"It's under-nourished," they say. "Not enough substance." Others have said there was too much "technical" and not enough entertainment. On the one hand, the season has been too experimental, and on the other, not experimental enough.

Well, for a start, the season is far from being short: there is enough strong choreography, with *Serenade*, *Schwansee* and *Rhapsodie Aut 3* to find at least two or three other full-length ballets.

But the future Sydney audiences do not want compassion, honesty and emotion; the future Sydney audiences want a full

length ballet with lots of costumes, sets and a nice story... putting ballet on a par with the Australian Opera, which we all know hardly ever puts its nose around the door into the 20th century.

One would have thought by now that these people had realised the essential difference in both content and manner of association between ballet and theatre/opera. Ballet dance, whatever you want to call it, can, if it wants to, add a new dimension to story-telling, but it can be "silent" nothing at all except itself, if it wants to.

Such a proposition is well compounded in Balanchine's masterpiece *Serenade*. *Serenade* is purely itself. Its language is its

inner and complete. It is about nothing else but dance. It's the art of work that always challenges an audience's imagination, it forces the audience to follow its argument and add drama if they feel so inclined.

Sydney audiences don't like to exert themselves, therefore, the most commonly heard descriptions of this work are "too busy", "confused" and "a lot of useless wandering about." I am surely tempted to say that words.

Now, I grant that the performance of this ballet by the dancers of the company is not the best, and that the conductor, Alan Barker, gave them no help whatsoever, but still cannot these people see the sublime logic, the restrained, unified emotion, the beauty and the exquisite mathematical of this work?

I can see why Balanchine is so wary of having his works performed by companies other than his own New York City Ballet. This company has been created solely by himself, his entire philosophy of the dance is personified in its dances. They have to be light, quick, long and leggy, chic, and totally trained to make his density of conception seem effortless and simple.

The Australian Ballet dancers have practically none of these qualities. On the opening night, *Serenade* was marred by spoiled lines, slow and sloppy movements and a general ignorance of the geometry that makes it.

Precise accuracy is needed here. With entire corps de ballet entries intertwining, with trues, solos and duets that start and end within the overall path of the music, the team simply must go like clockwork, one had moment and the future is irrevocably lost. With our dancers, the humour, the confusion, the money and partly limited enthusiasm made this beautiful great and a burning, boring dance class.

I thought that maybe the soloists would save the performance, but when Marlene Brown and Marilyn James went into their show, supported full to the ground with Kelvin Cui as the so-called "Angel of Death" too, and fell on their backsides with an audible bump — that was the end.

I can see the point of having the work in the repertoire: no company should be without it, it is an apt test of pure dance technique in any dancer. But, the performance does show that Miss Williams will still have an uphill climb to get this company to the standard of any other internationally known ballet company.

When it came to the second work on the third programme, my husband was disappointed any by the twenty seven-bath

collaborations of John Butler's *Sebastian*. This work has dated faster than James Dale and is just another reputation of Butler's usual borough over-masculine, over-sexed, "grab-drip-and-squirt-squirting" choreography.

Unlike *Sebastian's* Butler, *Sebastian* has no affinity with its theme. It goes on over-blown way despite whatever piece of music is playing at the time. It's just the same with *Caravan* *Sharon Lee* (Norton and *After Zane*). But here, of course, the Australian Ballet's dancers were more at home. If you did a step wrongly or didn't do one at all, — well just throw your weight out a little more and no one will notice.

Marilyn Rowe, in the lead part, looked downright embarrassed at all the fogged-up goings-on in the short drama of forbidden love, decadence, lust and witchcraft. And Alia Adler, as Sebastian, looked perplexed and dazed throughout, probably worrying about his body make-up rubbing off on everyone else as he was slipping.

With the last part of this programme, *Reveries*. Act 3, things improved a little. Here, in the Polka warhouse, the dancing was fiery, frenetic, well poised and arranged — everything it should be.

There was a poor excuse for a set and once again little help coming from the conductor, but the group work, the pose and chore and solos were done with gusto and enthusiasm. It's a totally mindless piece of choreography though one of these working celebrations that round off so many 19th-century Polka works with a bang. And, it hardly needs to be said, part the rest of things that are danced and over-entertained audience loves — no effort required.

But the music still had an air of its shivers, the von Fraugh reworking of the Coralli-Perroni classic, *Gauche*.

Van Fraugh won the Grand Prix de Paris for this interpretation and one can see why. Never has the feel and smell of classic French ballet been so real. Never has the explicit drama of this little ballet been so clear-headed by a philosophical voice been so palpable.

Van Fraugh has translated a lot of the original movement for the lead part, danced with exquisite restraint, freshness and delicacy by Marilyn Rowe. Yet she has interpreted a few extra bits of dancing for the Prince and for the peasants, using some of the basic archaic gestures of Cochet, but always with a view to strengthening the period flavor, so that some of the movement in both the first and second acts look as if they have just stepped out of those mid-19th-century lithographs by Delacroix.

It is a superb interpretation. The dancers know this, and throughout the season it was danced with masterful awareness.

If the dancers can bring this same awareness of technique and poetic application to *Wuthers* new production of *Swan Lake* later this year, the Australian Ballet will have another masterpiece to treasure in its repertoire.

## Going Home

'... it is remarkably valuable to have a range of works published so reasonably in one volume'



*Going Home* (and other plays) by Alma De Groen  
Curren Press Pty Ltd., Sydney 1977  
Recommended retail price \$4

We have become so used to Australian subjects being treated satirically and abusively in the theatre that Alma De Groen's recent major play, *Going Home* based on one of the women with extraordinary impact. It is now published by Curren Press along with the more satirical *Joan Adams Show* and *Perfectly All Right* is a fairly straightforward outline of her plays. To the director working on any one of these plays it should be interesting to compare them, and to the rest of us it is remarkably valuable to have a range of works published so reasonably in one volume.

The other two of these plays — connects *Joan Adams* and *Perfectly All Right* — work as a more restrained stylistic way that possibly looks back to De Groen's *The After-Life of Arthur Cress*. Perhaps

for this reason, it is easy to see *The Joan Adams Show* as a short theme on the historical-baby syndrome, but within the framework of the television interview the playwright finds room to show the bitterness of sexual and domestic life which leads to the death of Joan's baby. The interview emphasizes to the audience, in the social relationships towards a particularly desperate figure like Joan, but the flashes back and forward allow the husband's character to be presented with some sympathy. In the much shorter *Perfectly All Right*, a young boarder is confronted by a delicate lady who compassionately moves things about his room. The sexual attraction is an obvious one, but both are kept in balance by De Groen's comic treatment of this situation.

Both the short plays almost look like preparatory works for *Going Home*, which dramatizes a group of Australian emigrants' urban living and partly living in Canada. If one sees the wife Zee, then De Groen's earlier women have developed considerably. Like Zee, Zee is a compulsive shopper, but guilty to the point where she smothered purchased potter plants by locking them away from her husband's company. There is undoubtedly a sexual dimension in the obsession with furniture in this play too, but, as John Sumner warns in his introduction to *Going Home*, it is a mistake to see the play as a sociological account of wife-bashing, ugly people etc., and it is the laudably naturalistic form of this play which allows the playwright to move between comic and serious elements. *Going Home* works in a refreshingly non-conformist way — even the oppressive Tom has a sympathetic big speech which brings his wife back to him, and the playwright is not afraid of intimate moments between Zee and Jan, the central pair, when the music came down. All other things aside, Alma De Groen has written five superbly readable characters. Whether the characters are really as any one "going home" remains for one of the dramatic aspects of this play, but, as Max Cullen says in his fairly controversial comments on this edition, it does constitute an attack on the trendy attitudes which lead artists to apocryphal themselves before they have any sense of identity.



*Who's Who in the Theatre*

'... one must realise the immense task facing the editors and applaud them for... a magnificent result'

*Who's Who in the Theatre*, edited by Ian Herbert, with Christine Baxter and Robert E. Finley. Pinner, London (15 pounds) and Gile Research, Devon (250)

One of the two most invaluable reference books for theatre buffs must surely be *Who's Who in the Theatre*, the 16th edition of which has recently been published simultaneously in England and America.

Running into 1288 pages, it has been edited by Ian Herbert, assisted by Christine Baxter and Robert E. Finley, in association with an editorial board consisting of editors Richard Attenborough, John Gielgud, Michael Redgrave and Dorothy Tutin, and producers Alexander H. Cohen, Eirile Linder and Peter Saunders.

First published in 1912, apparently only two people have figured in all editions: Cissy Courtneidge and Arthur Saylor. The latest edition has been completely re-written throughout in a more modern and readable style, which also means that entries take up less space than previously.

Unlike most other kinds of *Who's Who*, this for the Theatre never becomes overly obsessive, since one consistently refers to previous volumes for details of artists who have died, quit and much other information. The eighth edition (1936), for instance, contained features long since

deleted: theatrical family trees, actresses who married into the peerage, Continued Performances, roll-of-honour for the 1914-18 War and theatrical wills. The 14th edition (1967) included 12 pages of photographs from producers of the past.

Dropped from the current edition is the list of names in the theatre section, and the general index to London playbills 1921-1965. This edition does, however, embrace London, New York, Stratford-upon-Avon, Chichester Festival and Ontario's Stratford Festival playbills for 1971-5, and a separate London and New York long-run list, provides details of London and New York theatres, plus openings of new ones, lists biographies from previous years now deleted, as well as obituary notes for 1971-6.

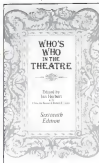
Coming to the main body of the book, the biographical section which takes up 944 pages, everyone is inevitably going to pick upon some equitable omissions and others whom they consider should not be included. Quoted, too, may be the fact that entries are not confined to performers but also take in directors, producers, playwrights, designers and even in some cases critics and publicists.

It is not difficult to light upon omissions and factual errors, particularly in dates. And it can be very irritating to find some well-known facts not recorded, particularly where the information must be available. As a minor example Coral Browne's current husband is correctly shown as Vincent Price, but the entry for Price indicates his wife is Mary Grant.

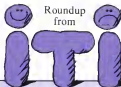
Exaggerating such criticisms, one might find the immense task facing the editors, and applaud them for what, after all is really a magnificent result. Having interviewed theatre folk for many years, I know all too well how frequently they can get their personal facts muddled, and thus frequently have to be checked and re-checked. Re-checking all the facts contained in this *Who's Who* is a chore I, for one, should not relish.

Most people will consider the Australian coverage totally inadequate. Perhaps here I may be allowed to add a personal note. In the previous edition, it seemed the only Australian featured currently living in the country was Ron Haddrick. I took it upon myself to point out this discrepancy to the editor and was asked to suggest likely names which could be put before the editorial board, keeping such a list extremely short. This I did, but, for some reason, not many of these people feature in this current volume.

I understood, however, that the next edition probably will contain more Australian entries. Lacking an illustration *Who's Who in the Theatre*, it is to be hoped future volumes may even go as far as to include details of Australian theatres and playbills.



# Australian Centre, International Theatre Institute



International Theatre Institute (ITI) Australian Centre, 111 Darling Street, Paris, Postal Sydney, Box 117, North Sydney, NSW 2061. President Robert Quaresima secretary Marie Therese editor Susan Pittman

## DIRECTORY OF CANADIAN PLAYS AND PLAYWRIGHTS

This very interesting directory contains synopses of more than 300 plays (including children's plays), biographies of 100 playwrights and an outline of the work of the Playwrights' Co-operative, Canada's 'largest fulltime centre for contemporary Canadian drama'.

The Playwrights' Co-operative, launched five years ago, 'publishes and distributes contemporary stage plays, provides a reading and consulting service for new and developing Canadian playwrights, and acts as an agency and service bureau'.

Scripts may be ordered from the co-op as long as they are prepared, and directors are available.

Copies of the directory are available for \$10 (Canadian) each to cover postage and handling from The Playwrights Co-operative, 8 York Street, 4th floor, Toronto, M5J 1R2, Ontario, Canada.

## MUSIC THEATRE TRAINING

The International Dance Section of the ITI has organised a 10-day seminar on music theatre training at the Roy Hart Theatre, Amiens, France, from 12 to 22 August.

Practical work will consist of group exercises in movement and voice-training, as well as individual help in singing, acting and dancing. Instruction will mostly be given by members of the Roy Hart Theatre, although participants may take part in exercises.

No fees will be required. However, there will be a modest charge for accommodation. People interested in this seminar should contact the ITI Australian Centre.

## THEATRE DES NATIONS

The festival of the Theatre des Nations,

1977 has been cancelled. Plans to arrange this ITI Festival in connection with the Nancy or Angoulême festivals fell through because a subsidy was refused by the French Government.

The festival of the Theatre des Nations, 1976 will probably be held in Caracas, Venezuela, and the fifth world season, in 1979, in Hamburg. The 1975 festival was held in Warsaw, and the 1976 festival in Belgium.

## INTERNATIONAL THEATRE TRAINING

The International Theatre Institute has arranged a contact office for developing an information exchange about international theatre training. The office is part of the Belgian ITI Centre and can be reached by writing to: Bureau de Liaison Internationale des Ecoles de Theatre, C/o Conservatoire Royal, 14 rue Foppens B—4000 Leige, Belgium.

## BRITISH THEATRE INSTITUTE

The British Theatre Institute invites membership its newsletter, which goes free to members, 'aims to report recent and forthcoming developments in the theatre across Britain'.

Membership rates are three pounds sterling for individuals from overseas and 10 pounds for corporations, who receive five copies of the B-TI Newsletter. Cheques should be made payable to British Theatre Institute and applications should be sent to: Membership Secretary, British Theatre Institute, c/o M. 55, 25 Bedford Square, London WC1B 3BE.

## WORKSHOPS/SEMINARS

A conference entitled 'Across Frontiers of Theatre' will be held at Canterbury, England, at the University of Kent, from 14 to 17 September 1977.

The aim of the conference is to explore popular drama and experimentation in its historical and contemporary forms. Other topics will include the interrelationship between film and theatre, and political theatre.

For further information write to: Dr Louis James, Keynes College, The University, Canterbury CT2 7NP, Kent.

## THEATRE HISTORY

An annual series in Theatre History organised by the Istituto Internazionale per la Ricerca Teatrale is to be held in Venice from 8 to 14 September 1977.

The theme will be 'Aspects of Realism and Naturalism in the Theatre of the Second Half of the 19th Century in Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, the Netherlands, Poland and Hungary'.

For further information write to: The Director, Istituto Internazionale per la Ricerca Teatrale, Casa di Goldoni, 5 Toma, 2794, 30123, Venezia, Italy.

## TECHNICAL EXHIBITIONS

The second CISCIO — International Fair of Cinema, Theatre, Concerts Hall, Production Equipment and Related Materials — will be held in Paris at the Parc des Expositions, Porte de Versailles, from 2 to 7 October 1977. For information providing free access to CISCIO, professionals wishing to attend should write to: Marie-Christine Assas, International Association CISCIO, Commissariat General J, Rue Garance, 92200, Neuilly, France.

## WEST VIRGINIA VISIT TO EUROPEAN THEATRE

The general manager of Mount West, Mr Donald McDonald, wishes to visit Japan in Australia 'on voyage' for a tour from 16 November until 26 December 1977 costing \$2710, which includes air fares, hotel accommodation, surface transport and tickets to 16 musical performances in Rome, Florence, Vienna, Salzburg, Munich, Zurich, Paris and London, as well as sightseeing in Italy, Austria, Germany, Switzerland, France and England.

Mount West's administrative officer of international tours, Suzanne Gibson, will accompany the group and will be glad to supply additional information at 69-71 Clarence Street, Sydney, NSW, 2000.

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## BUMPER SEASON IN NEW YORK

A.B. Weiner, formerly Professor of Theatre at the University of New South Wales, is Professor of Theatre at the State University of New York at Albany. He is the author of three books and many articles, mostly on Shakespeare. He has also published several studies on the 19th-century Sydney stage. George Geaghegan, one of Australia's first playwrights, thinks that from the grave he has been rescued by Weiner's reputation. In his spare time Dr Weiner directs plays, including recently a production of *A Summer's Dream* in Melbourne.

It happens every year around this time, and like the pains of childbirth, we forget that it was exactly like this last year. I am speaking of the annual auction in New York. It should have arrived on 21 March, but according to the polar blizzards that rained up Seventh Avenue it is still winter. We have forgotten that we should have remembered that spring never comes as far north as New York, so go directly from winter into summer. We are waiting, then, for summer to arrive and signal the winding down of yet another New York theatrical season.

It is probably presumptuous for me to try to sum up everything that has opened or closed during the 1976-7 season, and conclude that this was a good or bad or average season, but from the financial point-of-view it was a bumper year. In the midst of what has been called a serious inflation/depression, one sees more Cadillac, Lincoln, and Mercedes on the streets than ever before, and in spite of the skyrocketing costs of Broadway tickets, empty seats are rare. How come? American business ingenuity has once more triumphed in discovering a way to charge more for tickets than the market will bear, while at the same time not dis-

couraging the market. At present the price of a ticket for an ordinary, non-musical Broadway show is a bottom figure of \$15.10 to a top of \$1517.50. That is simply too expensive for many people, so the producers found a way to have their cake and eat it, to keep the theatres full without lowering their prices. There is a booth at Forty-ninth Street and Broadway where "twentys" are sold. "Twentys" of course, stands for "twentythousandfold", an old American custom. An hour or so before curtain time people begin to line up at the twentys booth where they can buy for half-price a ticket for almost any Broadway show that is not sold out. So, if you just want to go to the theatre regardless of what you see, and if you don't mind spending up, you can spend as little as \$6 for a ticket. While this practice has enormously replenished the New York stage, discounts will open and close. One of the most notable of recent changes was a down-and-quartered Carson and Carpova with Rex Harrison and Elizabeth Ashley. It closed after 12 performances and sustained a loss of \$1,500,000. Now Mr Harrison can go back to what he used enjoy and does best, making television commercials for American cars.

I am afraid that the most exciting aspect of Broadway at the moment is the financial rather than the artistic. There is a kind of counter-revolution on Broadway that is, I believe, unique in the world. It really must be seen to be believed. And I am not arguing that art must be kept pure from the money-disgrace. I think that the only artists who criticize money are failed artists. Money is as necessary to the theatre as oxygen, but this is not what I am talk-

ing about. The Theatre district is like a bazaar, a department store, a stock market, thousands of people buying, hundreds of people selling. One doesn't just buy a ticket, one makes a deal. Ticket agents — independent businessmen — invent a tickets the way stock brokers invent a shares of stocks. The ticket agents, who make their profit by racking on a stiff surcharge to all tickets they sell, have first choice on tickets when they are first put on sale. If they believe that a certain show is a "winner" they will buy heavily. New York businessmen, who are visited by buyers from all over the world, keep a supply of hard-to-get theatre tickets to sweeten deals, to help them get orders. Supplying tickets at a fancy price is an out-of-town buyer's rule.

Only buyers refer to plays as plays or actors as actors. The industry refers to shows as "properties". Thus, an actor who has had wide exposure on television on the variety, and who is expected therefore to attract a large audience, is a "hot property". Broadway producers, who must invest huge amounts to get a show on the stage, try to reduce their risks as much as possible by having as many "hot properties" as they can afford. Shows must, therefore, be packaged much like a tube of toothpaste or a box of detergent.

Here is a case. Back in 1971, Marvin Chazane, a mildly successful Broadway lyricist, decided that a musical based on the comic strip "Little Orphan Annie" had great promise. At that point he had not put pen to paper, nor did he have an artistic inspiration. He had only an idea to make money. It was not a failed idea, however, for there had already been successful musicals based on Lil Abner and Charlie Brown. Chazane had to package his idea.

\*Shows must be packaged like a tube of toothpaste



He got a certain Thomas Meehan to write the book, and Charles Shereau, a mildly successful Broadway composer, to compose the score. Charon himself would write the lyrics. Five years later, there was a surge of some sorts. A really hot property was needed. They went out to sign one of the hottest properties around, Mike Nichols, in producer and director. Six years later, in 1977, the package was ready to be tied up with a pretty but absolutely necessary ribbon named hype. Thus, for the past two months, stories and photographs about *Annie* are presented every time you open up the *New York Times* as well as many national magazines. The object of all this publicity? *Annie* must be made a hit even before it opens. Indeed, if by opening night — which is almost upon us — *Annie* is not sold out for the next three months, the show is *guaranteed* a failure and will probably close in a week or two. As any good manufacturer tries to package his product to make it appealing in the market place — quite aside from what is actually inside the package — *Annie* has been thoughtfully packaged. If it succeeds, it will make a fortune, not just in ticket sales, but from the cast albums, T-shirts, dolls, future royalties, perhaps film rights, etc., etc., of numerous. If it fails, perhaps \$750,000 of other people's money will have been lost, but that is an economic write-off.

I find this a good deal more interesting than most of the plays that are currently running. My greatest disappointment was a new play by Ronald Harpelle, *Cold Storage*. It has received excellent reviews, and I was able to get a ticket only after Mr. Harpelle graciously agreed to meet me at the box office and give me one of his business cards. Two of Harpelle's earlier plays — *Marve*, *Mean and Night* and *Journey of the Fifth Horse* — I consider to be among the best American plays for at least the last decade. Indeed, I had the pleasure of directing the former of these plays and it was an extremely satisfying experience.

But *Cold Storage* simply does not make it. It presents us with two cancer patients in a New York hospital, one a slowly advancing prostatesurgeon of advanced years, the other a sophisticated Jewish art dealer. For two acts these men discuss life's problems, cancer, and Jerusalem. No specific problem is posed and no solutions are offered. The writing by Martin Berman and Michael Lyman is fine, as is the direction by Joel Zwick, and the set by Kurt Lindell. Indeed, everything about the production is excellent except the play. In this case the parts are greater than the whole, the characters are strong and well-defined, and the dialogue is witty and even evasive. But *Cold Storage* is far closer to a continuing series on television than it is to a stage play. On writing a series of television drama, the single unalterable rule is that the protagonist must be exactly the same at the end of the show as he was at the beginning, for next week he must begin all over again. In stage drama the opposite is true. The protagonist must have a change of fortune, or metaphors. Without

the metaphor the action cannot be complete, for all actions that are complete must, by necessity, end in either success or failure. *Cold Storage* fails because it does not have a complete action, as one walks up the aisle after the final quarter, the prospect of forgetting what one has just seen is already well advanced.

I could make almost identical remarks about Simon Gray's *Chatterbox* (played in a London production that is still far from perfect) and, coming after one year, Tom Cawthorne's acting in all that one could wish, and Harold Pinter's direction was superb. I have always thought that Pinter was a far better director than a playwright, and this production strengthened that belief. In that *Chatterbox* (played last on metropolitan) — the protagonist is exactly the same at the beginning as he is at the end — it would be boring to recall the events that continue to bring about this violence.

The best show in New York at the moment is *Sly Fox* by Larry Gelbart, which is based on Ben Jonson's *Volpone*. It is masterfully directed by Arthur Penn, and wonderfully acted by George C. Scott, Jack Gilford, John Holliman, Bob Dole, and Homer Elinor. Larry Gelbart's greatest successes have been adaptations rather than originally conceived works. He is best known for his television series, *M\*A\*S\*H*, which was based on the film, and *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*, which was based on notes from Plautus. Mr. Gelbart is a very funny man, or, to put that more precisely, he seems to have little difficulty in making his audience laugh. I think there is a nice distinction here. To state this is a paradox, *Sly Fox* gets more laughs a minute than *Volpone*, but *Volpone* is a better comedy. If we could rate comedies on a laugh-meter, then Jack Benny and Bob Hope would be funnier than Shakespeare and Melrose.

The art of writing comedy would seem to comprise two distinct talents: the ability to create funny jokes, and the ability to create funny characters. The latter is clearly the more difficult and elusive talent. Falstaff and Melindas are unforgettable, jokes are atrociously forgettable. Mr. Gelbart's talent seems to be that of taking an already-created character and putting in his mouth an embarrassing sentence of jokes, one after the other. He is really quite clearing a long thin line.

I think, however, that Mr. Gelbart's triumph was less what he did in *Volpone* than what he didn't do. Specifically, he left Jonson's characters intact. He changed the locale and time to San Francisco in the late 19th century, and he changed the characters' names. Volpone becomes Frederick J. Sly, Mosca becomes Simon Able, Voltore becomes Lawyer Cramer, Corbaccio becomes Jeffery Crouch, and Corvino becomes Albert Trunkle. (These are really unfortunate choices compared to Jonson's wicked managers.) Further, Gelbart has written out all of the sub-plot material, and thus has changed Jonson's highly complex plot into a very simple one.

The action of *Sly Fox* concerns itself only with the clapping of Cramer, Crouch, and Trunkle. Gone are the characters of Sir Politic Would-be, Lady Would-be, and Peignieur, and all of the plotty stuff they are involved in.

But Gelbart has done more than merely simplify *Volpone*. He has sentimentalized it. While Jonson surely designed wit and folly, giving them no quarter while he created a world of animals representing a whole gallery of mankind's most vicious characteristics, Gelbart seems to think that such behavior is good, innocent fun. At the end of Jonson's play, Volpone has his wealth confiscated and he is imprisoned in the hospital of the incurable. Mosca is whipped and then imprisoned in the gallies. In *Sly Fox*, Sly and Simon, having lost their wealth on ahead of time, go off triumphant at play's end, to set up business elsewhere and, presumably, deplore their knavery on other unsuspecting souls. Thus, it seems to me, is the very antithesis of Jonson's purpose in writing *Volpone*, and thus, as a play to be read and pondered, it is greatly lacking, as a stageworthy vehicle, however, it is superb.

The production is brilliant. I had never seen George C. Scott on the stage before. I had seen him only in film, and I had concluded that he was a great actor, unquestionably America's best. Well, I must repeat that Scott is not a great actor. He lacks the transcendental imagination that separates great actors from the merely good. His own personality is too strong for him to submerge it to the degree where he actually becomes someone else. Yet he is a good actor, perhaps even a very good actor, and sometimes that can be more satisfying to an audience than to witness a great performance. While in his films he embodies the rest of his fellow actors like a Caliban, in *Sly Fox* he was just one of an excellent cast. I concluded that his overpowering of the fellow cast members in the film is more of a comment on the type of actor who works in Hollywood than it is of Scott. In the Land of the Blind, after all, the one-eyed man is king. In this production he was playing with a group of unusual New York professionalists, and they were not about to be overwhelmed. There was only one person in the cast who was obviously out of her depth: Trish Van Deuren. If she were unaware that she is the wife of George Scott, one might very well have his money trying to figure out why she was out. It has been announced recently that Scott will leave the company, but the production is so good that I do not think that that will make the slightest difference. ■



Peter Kenna's

**A HARD GOD**

Featured: Gloria Gawn as Aggie, Frank Gillies as Paddy, Graham Bruce as Dan

**"... in some ways a play . . . whose fine qualities have not yet been adequately acknowledged"**

Since *The Legend Of King O'Malley*, which, they say, set the great ball rolling, goodness knows how many new Australian plays have been given an airing in our theatres. Looking back over the so-called "renaissance", one at beginning to feel confident about which handful of plays from the whole writer is going to stand the test of time, and will still be of interest to theatrical managements, not to say

scholars, come the year 2000. One such play, I suggest, is Peter Kenna's *A Hard God* — in some ways a play, although certainly not neglected, whose fine qualities have not yet been adequately acknowledged.

*A Hard God* stands out from the rest of new Australian plays, so far as one can generalize about the rest, in a number of ways, and especially by avoidance of some

of its clichés and excesses. It endows Ockerman, the intellectual middle-class messiah, historical pastiche, satirical cozen, brave and blurted four-letter language, sexual daring. Rather than any of those obsessions, it has what good and great plays have always had: a grappling with the complex problems of living, and genuine feeling for human beings beset with life's dilemmas. Is less of cleverness it has honesty.

A keener of all worthwhile literature is the arousal of the sympathetic emotions, and *A Hard God* achieves this arousal. Peter Kenna has that quality which is not easy to find in so many of his colleagues,

and which Katharine Hepburn has as rightly deserved compassion. He has obviously a great affection for the people in his play, and a deeply felt sympathy for their struggles in the coils of both religious faith and family relationships. The sensitivity of the writing causes these feelings to be shared with the audience and the reader.

We sympathise with the characters' involvement with the play's central issue of

which is at the centre of his or her being, and on which depend, and which they explain, all of his or her behaviour and attitudes. Martin's spiritual crisis, for example, wants to be "no name". Aggie's "to put her family first". This emotional clarity and consistency of conception gives the characters a strong independent life. They are recognisably human.

The characters are, moreover, intrinsically Australian, exemplifying the

life and living which are confined to rejection the problems of middle and old age (physical slowing down, dimming eyesight, loss of the marriage partner, disadornment from one's home, an unstable marriage relationship which has gone on all too long, estranged brother and sister relationships) the "generation gap" problem, the problem of sex in adolescence and in particular that of homosexual attachment. There is, furthermore, the great universal theme of the burden of Time, which is so beautifully coherent in the play.

In summary, the characters in *A Hard God* are all victims of forces beyond their control, but has always been the wall of tragedy in literature.

One should also comment on the structure of the play. It attempts a degree of correspondence within the naturalistic mode — parallel actions. It was perhaps this aspect of the play which attracted harshest critical comment at the time of its first production at the Mairland Theatre, Sydney, in September 1973. H. G. Sapping, for one, asserted that there was a serious flaw in "a lack of linkage" between the family scenes and the scenes between the two boys, Jon and Jack. That was too severe. Linkage was there if one attended closely, but I think one has to concede that there was a need for a greater clarity in this regard, a somewhat stronger linkage. When the play was published by Currency Press, Peter Kemp has added the first five speeches of the text, and shown Jon in the domestic circle. This economic measure, I believe, resolves the problem already.

Some critics made remarks such as "the play is a little windy", and saw some of its long speeches as lack of event taken as a blemish. These responses failed to recognise the loss of the play and its structural theme in regard to time. As Susan Dermod said in *Spectator*: "The family is focused in that moment when the threats are most concentrated then passing, and there is the possibility for working over them and even understanding them, in quietness." Part of the Cassidy pathos is in the fact that time is very much grinding to a standstill for the older members of the family (who indulge in the long bouts of talk), yet for young Jon oscillates between a rapid look-asking speed on the one hand, and a slow considering pace on the other. Thus Katharine Hepburn in the Australian perceived that, among other things, the form of the parallel actions of the play, by juxtaposing these periods, represents "an experiment with time."

There are many other observations which could be made. Suffice it to repeat that *A Hard God* is a destined fine play, and that one day it will be given a critical analysis at a depth of approach in which is proportionate to its merits, and which has not only been possible here.



W. A. National Theatre: Jon Sweeney as Aggie, Geoff Gillett as Don.

the difficulty of mounting faith in a loving God when he imposes a harsh life-experience and when the Church exacts severe duties and discipline. We sympathise with Don's huge solace and the unfairness of the storm played upon him by unfeeling brothers. We understand Aggie's love, her forthrightness, her occasional toughness. We feel for Martin's struggles with his faith (because their rescue is so clearly and tolerantly explained in the play) and his efforts to express himself as writing. We appreciate young Jack's efforts to reconcile his sexual awakening and disposition with the "hard God" of his upbringing.

Our sympathies are sustained even in the comic scenes. Indeed, a real achievement of the writing is in its lively and loving blend of humour and pathos. Don's reading of the paper on top of the table in order to be near the light is comically comic, but is also moving because his failing eyesight is both a symptom of decline and another unfair burden for an already overtaxed man. Paddy and Monica are outrageously comic in many ways, but a sadistic, look pervades these peculiar relationships.

*A Hard God* is a good play because it is so vital. Its people live because they are realised so richly and unambiguously, but also conceived so simply and clearly. The playwright, like all good authors, has given each of them a discernible motivating drive

workplaces which that which so many of us — and our values — spring. *A Hard God* is a good play because it justifies its character attitudes and behaviour by showing them determined by strong, irremediable social, economic and religious forces. There are few pieces of Australian writing, let alone plays, which demonstrate so vividly the Irish-Catholic ethos in Australia, and which expose so potently the nature of the influence of the Depression on Australian families. (How accurate, for instance, is the dispossession and migration of the Cassidy family, as to be one more small example, the telling reference to the son of Captain Selworthy.)

In a very real sense, *A Hard God* is a sociological document. It is a history play, or at least a play in which a period — its language, habits, values, mores — is so integral to the drama as the plot and character development. I am certain that this slogan in the play alone will guarantee the play's survival. How astutely woven into the fabric of the play, for example, is such language and social allusions as "He's got the measles on him", "Brixton", "Paddy was coming in at the bookmaking business", "a bulging chaff-bag", "Have you ever gone all the way with a girl?", "I'm going up to Woy Woy", "bloomin'", "Civil Angles", and "Saturday night dinner."

The play also touches on other themes of more than superficial interest, matters of

Research material for students and teachers, with photos, excerpts from reviews, study questions, essay questions and comments by Peter Kemp and Don Read, is available from Currency Press, 87 River Road, Woburn, NSW 2025.

## 'THE CRYSTAL PALACE' STARTS A NEW LIFE

**'It has to be significant when a movie house changes to live theatre'**

Some sort of theatrical history must have been made in April when Nanette Hayes and Gaiarre Blundell opened the Regal Theatre in Perth with Bernard Slade's *Some Time Next Year*. With theatres closing in all directions, it has to be significant when a movie house changes to live theatre. And that's what happened at the Regal.

The Regal was built as a movie house in 1937 (it opened in April 1938) by a man called Cande, who was grandfather to playwright-poetess Dorothy Hewett. In fact, Dorothy's father, Tom Hewett, was manager, and it's the Regal that figures so prominently as the Crystal Palace in Dorothy Hewett's play *Don Bore and Acres for Dolly*.

I sat close to Dorothy at the Hollywood-type gala opening on 15 April this year. It had all the enormous marquee girls propping it a closed-off street under the screaming spotlights, a band playing, policemen at all entrances, radio and TV personalities driven up in large cars hired by the organisers, and half the population of Subiaco crowding round to see the free show and watch the celebrities walk up the red carpet. In fact, you couldn't see the

carpet because the celebrities were stuck in a bottleneck, trying to sway their busy invitations for next season. But it was all good fun, and — to coin a phrase — a good time was had by all, particularly in the afterglow supper later.

I asked Dorothy how a film to be back just a little nostalgic, she answered. She was with her mother, Dr Douglas, of Perth, and for both of them it brought back a lot of their adolescence that had centred round the place. And surely the Dolly of the play must have a great deal of Dorothy herself.

The Regal's interest history has been interesting. It is owned by 66-year-old Pat Baker, a Western Australian counterpart of the leading figure in Jean Lang's recently released film *The Picture Show Man*. Baker began in films at the age of eight, turning the hand-cranked projector at Subiaco, a goldfields town, now in the ghost category but then a prosperous place with a population of well over a thousand. His father was a travelling runner. Pat got fourpence a night — "three nights for a boy," he explains — and eventually worked his way up and he owned his own travelling show. "Baker's Photo-Play The Lane" it was called. "I never remember

movies," Pat says. "After all, a picture show is just a filmed play." He worked 16 hours a day for seven days a week, and visited just about every outback town in the State.

He ended up a rich man, a notable property owner in Subiaco, where the Regal stands. And eventually he gave up his travelling show and started opening drive-in movies. He now has an or seven of them scattered around the State. He also had an expensive movie house just across the road. He bought the Regal from his friend Tom Hewett in 1946.

He's very proud of the Regal. "It was the finest theatre in the Southern Hemisphere when it was built," he claims. "And it was the first with air-conditioning." This fact isn't quite accurate by modern standards, but it did have a splendid air-cooling system, which could blow in cold and carbon hot air in the summer, and heat it during the winter. It wouldn't be difficult to convert this to modern air-conditioning.

Although he will go on to show or screen on Sundays, he's also very pleased that the theatre has gone over to stage plays. "I've got all the money I need," he says. "So I'm not going to charge high rates." In fact, the seat he's taking is reserved by Perth standards, where the rental of Her Majesty's makes local productions there almost impossible. And he's eager going to let the place be bulldozed or turned into a warehouse.

The success of the Hayes-Blundell show, followed by an equally successful Gordon Chait in *The Education of Benjamin Franklin*, makes it likely that a well known event to bring a movie house. John Thornton, Western Australian representative of Parashute Productions, and a director of interest, said that he has several other shows lined up. There is talk, too, of *Don Bore and Acres* being produced again in the theatre that played such a part in it.

It all has taken place, live theatre in Perth might have a new lease of life. The possible dampening of the stage would mean that the WA Ballet — starved of a proper home at the moment — could hope to put on shows at a profit, which is almost impossible in places like "The May" and the Playhouse. The West Entertainment Centre is quite impossible for anything but Edgely extravaganzas.

One can only hope that Parashute-Innovator keep on being as successful at the Regal as they have been up to now. Because the foyer will no longer be "teebing with silence" and there won't be midrow on the boxes any more.



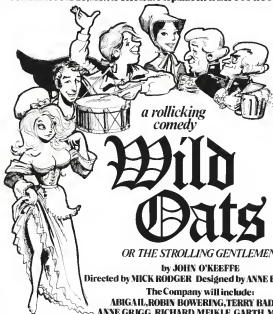
Picture-show-man Pat Baker with Blundell Hayes and John Thornton of Parashute



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## The Picture Show Man The FJ Holden



### Contrasts in 'style and content — and possibly in aim . . .'

It must be taken as a plea for our miserable film industry that it can in the same week present two films as different in style and content — and possibly in aim — as *The Picture Show Man* and *The FJ Holden*.

I don't say that one is "better" than the other, though I tend to think that, with everything that's the matter with it, *The FJ Holden* will last longer in our consciousness.

To take *The Picture Show Man* first, it is set strictly in good old Mordialloc, where the seaside looks as city-dwellers think it should look, or as they remember it looking when they were holiday kids fishing in a creek. Assuming they ever fished in a creek. Once on the track towards Nossalgubed, the accompanying images proliferate embarrassingly. Anyway, is this country a dogged John Mielton, wearing a worried frown, mustache and a head gear with a velvet collar which might have been more suitable for Broadway, shows films as mechanics' instructions and church bells while a companion bangs out lyrics in the borrowed piano. His territory is invaded by someone to whom he actually taught the business, in the person of Rod Taylor, presumably hired to attract overseas audiences. The plot is who will survive?

Between the beginning, which is pretty, and the end, which is jolly, there is a series of modified variety turns in which John Ewart, Judy Morris, Kenneth Williams, Gerry McEwan, Yvonne Ziga, Frank Coughlin and other performers with recognisable names take part. One rec-

dent emerges with the other, one through a golden haze of recalled and commercial deals, bumping androgynous and erotic sexual encounters. When John Mielton purports to make a marriage pact at the beautiful Yelena, you know he doesn't mean it and would be appalled if she accepted his advances. The character's strongest quality is bluff — mustaches to hide a lined lip, blazer to disguise fear, a velvet collar to distract attention from frayed cuffs. John Mielton does the character very well, but the character itself is a caricature.

So what is the point of *The Picture Show Man*? Presumably films are made for commercial gain, or to say something the greater truths should be said, or to change people's habits and opinions, or to preach a political sermon, or to relieve personal rebellion, or the lot is a long list.

Miss Jean Long produced *The Picture Show Man* from the recollections of Lyle Paine, whose father was one in the same period and landscapes. I should say that she hoped the film would succeed commercially without having to ponder to the centre of the lowest opinion disseminator, whenever he pays his \$2.50 for a seat. But while money can be pulled up and put aside at the point of a bank, as a film needs support, such as a real understanding of inevitable changes in the human condition and their tragic occurrence in time and place. If there was a glimpse of this in the film, it came fleetingly in Judy Morris's performance as one of those deluded, acutely but overwrought ladies who pursue culture in country

counties. The film has been described as "charming in its simplicity." I find it simple, but not charming. And, quite often, boring.

There is not much of *The FJ Holden* that is boring, but a good deal of it is repetitive, scenes go on too long and are so badly delineated that characters, vehicles and interiors are all too easily confused. Not that this could be said about the FJ Holden itself once its faded and splattered paintwork has been covered in shiny-yellow Duco. The car is, as Michael Thornhill no doubt intended, the one thing you won't forget.

Thornhill, sometimes known as film, sometimes film critic, maker of *Screeners* films, as producer, director and writer of *The FJ Holden*, and this may be the reason why it doesn't really work very well. His possibly amusing but becoming manner, the kind of film man who gets in a name above the product, and the performers. In this case, he has a fair way to go, although I don't believe for a moment that he will act for sure. If Thornhill has faith in his genre, so have a lot of other people.

*The FJ Holden* is set in Sydney's western suburbs, of which physiognomy takes in other big Australian cities and its miniature form right across the Commonwealth, and is about a couple of selfish young men and a shop assistant they pick up one night and copulate with in the FJ Holden.

She attaches herself to the best bet of the two, so is the way of girls in suburbs other than women, and in as time they are "going together", showing one another a mixture of fondness and anticipation and having it off not only on the back seat of the car (rip down, squawk, grunt, zip up) but in her bedroom while her father is in the lobby. The first roll, as the Victorian used to say, comes when he lets his mate watch. There is then a punch-up at a Saturday night party, rap, driving charges and hideout.

Thornhill as writer — his verbal role — dodges the issues of the relationship between parents-and-police and the control factors, if that's the term for them. Here the writing is shapless, flabby. It resembles one of parts of the script in the television series *Crimes Women* where the writing was presented to the audience as shapeless honesty — a literary confidence trick.

Thornhill gets good performances from his non-actors, Paul Cameron and Ben Dickinson, and some of the rest of the cast is equally good.

It is hard to say where the audience for this film will come from, or if there will be any after the first curious wave.



## Vespers: the great Monteverdi enigma

**'Fortunately, we now have more than one recording of this astounding music which can give us a very fair idea of what an ideal performance of it might sound like'**

Of all Monteverdi's works the *Vespers* of 1591 is the most mysterious. It is not certain whether it represents music conceived as a single work or merely as an anthology of Monteverdi's songs and capacity for church music. If the music was intended to constitute a single work, why are there two *Magnificats*? And why are all the pieces linked, as in a kind of appendix, to the unique Mass in traditional style which stands at the beginning of the published music? Dates and places of pre-Venetian performances of the music have never been established, although it seems fairly certain that all or part of the music was performed at Marino as well as at Venice. It, as seems likely, Monteverdi put the collection together in order to improve his chances of getting a more important job in Rome or Venice; his plan was successful in the long run. The *Vespers* would have commended him to the patrons of St Mark's, Venice, as the master musician of his age.

When we have said that, however, we have to admit that the music itself is occasionally enigmatic to the point of opacity. Confused notes such as the *Duo Seraphim* and the vocal entries are so overbearing in their demand for the highest skills of vocal agility and ornamentation as to transcend any passage in the surviving Monteverdi operas in this regard. The use of *canto fermo* in many of the extended pieces seems curiously old-fashioned in music which is obviously intended to demonstrate Monteverdi's complete mastery of the aesthetic and technique of the early baroque. The complexity of notes and proportions, the funkiness and wilfulness of some of the part writing are unusual for a composer whose work is always always calculated at exactly the level of complexity needed for a particular performance. Some of the music seems so secure as though it would need a far denser acoustic than would likely be available in any of the churches used by the composer for this music.

The published layout of the *Vespers* has long misled performers and would-be performers in their approaches to it. Because it seemed like a major ecclesiastical occasion, something to be put alongside the Bach *Passions* or the Mass solemnity, the

early arrangements and realisations of it before and after World War II made it sound far too thick and grandiose. The tradition began of viewing it as a work for choral societies and to this day such bodies tend to assume that a choral group can master the necessary additional notes to perform the work without falsifying its nature. The truth is usually the reverse: The attempts to perform the *Vespers* should begin with solo singers and skilled instrumentalists. Choral resources ought to be the last and least important element to be considered. Much of the *Vespers*, including many sections of the psalm settings, consists of writing for concertall solo voices. The choral parts in the proceedings are relatively small and it is certainly not enough by itself to ensure the realisation of the work as a satisfactory reunion.

It was a failure to realise this that made the 1973 Adelaide Festival performance of excerpts from the *Vespers* so unsatisfactory. The psalm settings had obviously been thought of as the first instance in choral settings and the search for enough skilled soloists, vocally and instrumentally, had never come within hearing distance of success. I think that the *Vespers* is due to be performed at an elite-vocary choral festival this year. I cannot think of any work less suitable for a large body of singers to attempt as such a gathering.

We must at least give thanks to those persons such as Walter Goehr who established a technique of performing the *Vespers*, even if they also misperceived them. The work is still extremely difficult to prepare for the concert hall or the festival church performance. Fortunately, we now have more than one recording of this astounding music which can give us a very fair idea of what an ideal performance of it might sound like.

The first set of the kind came out on Telefunken (SANT 991-03, 2 discs) and offered some excellent instrumental performances on the original instruments (at leastal copies of them) specified in the score. It also offered incomparable agility from the tenor, Nigel Rogers, as one of the soloists and the last four verses of the *Venite Regni* Choir of suitable members of the work, notably in the subtle restraint of

the *Soprano* signs *Soprano* Mass, which soon with such total beauty shows the complicated variations for instruments. The Monteverdi Choir of Hamburg left something to be desired in intonation, and the clarity of the recording was below the level of many of Telefunken's later recordings of Monteverdi and his contemporaries.

A more recent Decca recording of the *Vespers*, under the direction of John Elgar Gardiner in London, uses modern instruments for the instrumentally important parts and, therefore, achieves a much less authentic realisation of the sound world of the work. On the other hand, Gardiner's forces as a whole handle the music with far more assurance and style, and at that aspect his recording is preferable to the Telefunken version.

Another version, involving a vocal and instrumental ensemble in Lausanne under the direction of the emperor of Monteverdi studies, Michel Corbucci, has become available again in a World Record Club release (R 01933, three discs). This is unusual in offering not only the first and longest *Magnificat*, but both *Magnificats* a quite satisfactory arrangement for records, as the latter retains the choice of playing either in either of these parts. The decision to include both *Magnificats* probably the recording on to three discs, but the low-price release of the discs balances to a large extent the disadvantage of having to buy an extra record. Corbucci uses some traditional instruments including the wooden cornetts of the period, but his instruments of brass are far less rich or loudly located than those of the Telefunken set. His tenors, Eric Tapp and Hugues Cazaux, certainly possess character and poignancy, but their more elaborate vocalisations do have a resemblance to the blurring of sleep. The Corbucci version would be very acceptable as a concert performance on disc: it lacks the refinement of instrumental work and the quality of solo singing that we expect from discs of such music. But it does offer the extra *Magnificat*.

Up to now, the choice has been between major but limited authenticity from the Gardiner version and substantially copied with a certain degree of direction from the performance directed by Rogers on Telefunken. A newer version directed by Philip Ledger for EMI (CHW 5LS 0064, 2 discs) offers a happy realisation of the difficult choice. Ledger's recording, based on an edition prepared by him and Denis Arnold, is even more brilliant in its use of an acoustically appropriate instrument than the Telefunken version (compare, for

example, the much greater stylisation and accuracy of intonation of the vowels, even when the trope is considerably fainter, and a thoroughly vital control of rhythm, some very fine solistic and genuine flair in realising the contrasts of proportion and metre in the score. Anthony Rolfe Johnson and Robert Tear are not as truly based in the difficult lower notes as Nigel Rogers in the Turlingtons, but they make a better match for each other than Rogers and his second tenor. Tear is inclined to growl a little in his vocal passages, but there is one section of the *Asch* coven where he and Rolfe Johnson share like a pair of dogs worrying a bone. On their competence, however, there is no doubt, and they have some fine associates

in Billy Arnold and Norman Burrows (in the two solo soprano parts), Charles Brett (alto), Martin Hill (third tenor) and Peter Knapp and John Noble (bass). The speed of the instrumental playing in the opening *Overt* is adjudicated as breathtaking when the *Inciter* hints at raised the difficulty of playing the crotch parts (taken from the playing position for Monteverdi's *Diptych*, but Michael Lund and Iain Orr) Wilson never fails. The late and much-lamented David Maxwell leads the Early Music Consort of London with some of the additional instrumentalists, and the choral lines are taken with the greatest accuracy and with no sense to characterisation, even by the choir of King's College, Cambridge.

The basis for the overall success of this

concert, however, is the performing ideas of itself and the conducting of Lodge. On the evidence of this performance Lodge's rights as King's may prove to be even more distinguished than that of his predecessors, Boris God and David Wilkie. Although the renaissance period of the music of some of the final choral movements in this recording was made, presumably, in King's College Chapel, the microphone techniques employed ensure that we hear the intricate detail of vocal and instrumental parts well enough. No misreading of a work as full of textual difficulties as the *Figures* is even likely to be wholly successful. This one concert is close to success as I can imagine happening at the moment.

## Ray Stanley's

# WHISPERS & FACTS



It was the usual story when *Tormentor's* *Tormentor's* opened in Melbourne (it is a full-on full *Paragon* Theatre — last of publicity by the Australian Distribution Theatre Trust, which was presenting the show. Several personal box-office successes have been turned through the trust's inefficient publicity machine. Pity KWA didn't take up the show. *The Pleasure of My Company*, with Douglas Fairbanks Jr, Stanley Holloway and David Langdon, made such a hit with the blue-rose ladies of Melbourne, it could return in a few months. It is the girls Australia could see a commercial production of *50 For the current Broadway smash hit based on the Jonson's *Volpone*.*

Should be surprised if Jill Fryer is not in the Australian production of *Sale By Society Securities*.

Those "doctors" Robin Nodwell and Geoffrey Dwyer are packing 'em in again in a play even worse than *Shower in the House* (if that's possible). Why can't such people tour in something worth while? They would retain their self-respect, introduce new good plays to Australia, attract new audiences who would be surprised they actually liked something they otherwise would not have seen, and then everyone at all could would be happy. Why not?

Who is a young Cyril Richard? After seeing him in stage in Sydney, David Wilson, according to Joyce Grenfell, who should know as he was in *Conrad and Conrad's* *Spit to Move with Richard*. A one-man show on four which sounds interesting in *Limited Ticks in The Legend of Henry Lawrence*.

Although they did poor box-office business, I've heard good things about Hunter Valley Theatre's touring productions of *Midnight's The Last Days Show* and *Secret The Key-Match Show*, both directed by John Tucker. Tucker is going to direct *Over a Fiddle Against the Wind at Pine Street* (see Quotes and Quines), with John Pearson in the cast. The original cast album of *The Innocent and All That Jazz* should be out soon. Understand Lynn Curran is returning in the Melbourne stage in the MTC's production of *David Rusk's* *Arise*.

Remember Barbara Angell who used to be in the *Modern Australian Show* centrally and in revues and musicals around Melbourne? Apparently she's taken the Arts Theatre Club in London for a summer season of teaching play-writes and acted by Australians. First up is a one-woman play by Max R. Richards with the lady herself, followed by a double bill by James Norman, *Substitute* and *There's a Mervyn Here Tonight*, and later Miss Angell's own *The Final Announcement*. Other members of the company are Penny Smith, Charles Pemberton and John Turnbull.

Recently I was sent programmes for the South Australian Theatre Company's first three 1977 productions. To me they appear the most informative and best designed of any of the substandard companies. Andrew Gould explains-hand-man to Michael Edgley, will soon check up his 40th year in the *Secret Uppa*. Gird to see this fine actress Julia Hertz in once more making the boards, playing *Madam Ranevsky* and *Elizabeth Proctor* in Peter Oyden's productions of *The Cherry Orchard* and *The Crucible* for the Alexander Theatre Company.

A well-known personality in Melbourne showbiz circles is branching out as an impresario and trying to lure Betty Stort to Australia. Maybe Graeme Keller

too. Tipped by some for future stardom as actor Tom Courtenay, said to be in the mould of Peter Finch. It must be difficult, and perhaps a little embarrassing, for a theatre director whose wife is an actress. Take Colin Gregg, for instance, of the South Australian Theatre Company. Wonder how many of the other actresses around are happy about her being given the plum role of Lady Teazle. Vanya in *The Cherry Orchard* and, in August, the lead in *Anne Get Four-Gun*. But tonight she's wiggling in Adelaide. Overboard at a performance of *A Chorus Line*. "I'm going to see the show again, Maude. I want to see who the director chooses for his musical next time!"

## A FAMILIAR FACE TO ALL THOSE INTERESTED IN THE THEATRE



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## Melbourne gets a break

'Victorians have been vouchsafed . . . two thoroughly rewarding opera experiences'



Melbourne opera-lovers have been complaining — often quite justifiably — in recent years that the national opera company gives their city a raw deal. Certainly, the only promise of a new production vouchsafed them by the Australian Opera last year was a rather unattracting re-creation of a Glyndebourne original (*Janacka's The Cunning Little Viper*) and all five of the new AGO productions for 1977 will first be aired at the Sydney Opera House.

But I can state unequivocally, on the basis of a two-night Melbourne stand in May, that Victorians have been vouchsafed, this year, two thoroughly rewarding opera experiences that will not be available in Sydney. Both productions involved — Mozart's *Marriage of Figaro* and Beethoven's *Fidelio* — were revivals of John Copley originals, *Figaro* from 1971 and *Fidelio* from 1970, but neither was wearing as age-bodily.

Indeed, the Copley *Figaro*, which was widely acclaimed when it first saw the light of day and had improved on its original high standard so much that the Sydney music critics singled its revival out as the most significant music event in the city last year, was almost as good as this year's Melbourne opening as it has ever been. John Pongle (Count Almaviva) and Ronald Macgregor (Figaro) were both as magnificent form-dominating as their interpretations of roles they made their own long ago. Ned Warner-Smith (Bartolo) and Rosina Reinisch (Marcellina) continue to give superb readings of their demanding supporting

roles. Robert Gird's Basilio, as dramatically strong as ever, showed remarkable vocal improvement in the aftermath of his recent study against in Germany; he is now producing by far the most pleasing sounds I have ever heard from him, and it is a thorough pleasure to see him again in a character role he does so superbly. And Cynthia Johnson's Susanna — always a pleasure — was a pure delight in this occasion.

Only Nancy Green's Countess and Jennifer Birmingham's Chrysothene were disappointing — the former for her involvement on the acting front and her occasional vocal harshness, particularly in her first big aria, "Porgi Amore"; the latter for her occasional misapprehension of the admirably hard-to-draw line between high-spirited comic acting and the sort of incensed clamour about that reduces Chrysothene to a mere adolescent huff-buff. But for a first, if passing mention must be made of Melinda Sherman (the only new face on the cast), whose Barbarina was most pleasingly sung and presented.

Perhaps it was only to be expected that this *Figaro* would be vocally good — though clearly Michael Beauchamp, who achieved a far Melbourne, deserves a good deal of credit for ensuring that, most of the time, at any rate, the production retained its original lean and mean tightness. The big surprise, though, came on the orchestral front when the conductor, Peter Robinson, was able to impose the Elizabethan Melbourne Orchestra to give nearly as good a performance as we have come to expect of its Sydney counterpart.

This may sound condescending, but it is emphatically not, for it is common knowledge that the EMO has been through a very difficult period in the past year or so and has simply not been able to achieve the same general level of excellence as the Elizabethan Sydney Orchestra. It would be wrong to think it is the equal even now of the ESO, but most of the time one is not unduly conscious of that fact: it is only when the strings lose their consistency or the woodwind ensemble falters for an instant, or where some expected virtuoso demand of the score is not quite coped with, that one feels marginally let down.

The opening Melbourne performance of *Figaro* on 12 May — which was rather tactically recovered by the audience — was a good deal more satisfying all round than the following night's *Fidelio* under Carlo Felice Cillipio. Largely this seemed to be an orchestral problem, for the EMO had much more trouble coping with the demands of the Beethoven score. I am not quite sure about the merits of Cillipio's unorthodox reading of the score — as particular by exaggerating variations in tempo between numbers, and I have never really warmed to *Fidelio* as an overall work of art, much though I love practically every note of the score. Perhaps the basic problem lies in the way it seems always at the verge of reducing its characters to debilitated symbols in a political tract, only in the very best of performances can one really believe in the human individuality of the characters. At any rate, the actual flaws were exaggerated by the particular performance.

The orchestral playing was a good deal less effective than it had been the night before, perhaps an inevitable loss following the prelude of the last opening of the season, but the stage performers also seemed to be suffering from a malaise once the supernatural bonus of Cillipio was unable to counteract. Even the powerful chorale, an initial moment of high drama that almost cannot possibly go wrong in performance, was (again, a little boring, in this occasion. Only Ronald Dowd's Florestan — an absolutely new followed by a more than convincing realisation of the rest of the role — really measured up, in the final analysis, to the full potential of the role.

Lena Koppel-Winter was disappointingly wrong Leonore/*Fidelio*, but was quite disturbing at times vocally, particularly in her big aria in the second scene. As Pizarro, John Shaw was inclined to gabble his spoken dialogue and his singing was as unfocused as if he had the proverbial pin in his mouth. Beryl Furber's Marcelline was

is pleasant to Graham Davis's Jacopino, but the only serious dramatic point of either of these being there — the hint of a neurotic, amorous attachment between her and the monkey-faced Pichu — was completely lost. Neil Murray-Smith, doing yeoman service after his considerable stint as Barriello the night before, was a reassuringly unimpaired, outstanding figure of a Rocco who acted and sang very well indeed; and Robert Allan was in his usual fine form at the late start of the opera. Don Fernando (but finally the strong points of this Pichu did not altogether counterbalance its weak ones, and it all added up to a disturbingly unimpassioned viewing of the opera when Pichu might never be his! Even so, it was an experience worth the hearing, and one which Sydney opera-lovers will not be able to dismiss this year.

behind a screen.

The main trouble with the Canberra Pasquale was that the principals, once the action got going, were set, by and large, capable of living up to the admirably stringent acting demands of the piece: but they squarled enough to undermine that setting, the result would have been a outstanding success. Once again, then Pasquale proved that it is a good deal harder to bring off the building interference of comic opera on performance, than to convince an audience of the credibility of even the most outrageously improbable chain of tragic events. Tragedy seems to promise its own peculiar usual standard of willing suspension of disbelief; comedy, performed at less than the comic expert level is simply prone to fall flat on its face.

Franz Booby's Morrie lacked a measure of the vivacity that makes this character at

Sydney's Rockdale Town Hall presented *That's My Jery* and *The Sorcerer* with less than the usual success we have come to expect of this company. Robert Hatherley played both the title role in *The Sorcerer* and the Judge in *That's My Jery*, but was not at his best in either part on an opening night. Most of the other leading roles were taken by the G and S stalwarts of the suburban circuit — Ralph Dunsen, John Welsh-Lingans, Mary Blake, Patrick Donnelly. Dunsen's Boak did appear and was never less than adequate. But Brian Phillips's production lacked conviction, and conductor Collins, Ashton was prone to rush things along relentlessly instead of allowing the lyrical and lyrical to achieve maximum impact of their own volition.

The other double bill, a joint effort of the School of Opera and Music Theatre at the New South Wales Conservatorium and the Australian Opera Studio, copied little-known works by well-known composers. *Dr. Miracle*, by Bart, and *Win and Zorak: Three and Back*, by Hindemith.

*Dr. Miracle* has a plot line that almost makes it seem derivative of two great, Dostoevski comic operas combined. *The Elder of Love* and *Don Pasquale*, though it hardly has the musical or dramatic merit of either of them. John Gerrard, of the Australian Opera, played the tyrannical father of the piece, who also happens to be Mayor of Padua. Kathleen Moore his wife, Judith Saliba his daughter, and Eddie Walder the daughter's lover Salva, who won't last in various disguises before finally winning her hand.

Wilton and Moore also played leading roles in the Hindemith piece, which literally progressed forward to halfway point and then retroceded itself back by back to end up where it started, musically and dramatically. Jennifer Lindfield, Colin Gell, Geoffrey Crooks and Geoffrey Harris also appeared in this very brief opera.

Simply staged, well if not outstandingly sung, and presented in a slightly extended lunchtime or mid-afternoon format, as these two works were, they have a good deal of merit both as class exercises for student opera singers and as short entertainment. And this particular double bill was equally welcome for the long-overdue spirit of co-operation it demonstrated between the student branch of the national opera company and the opera branch of the New South Wales Conservatorium. Such ventures should become a staple feature of the Sydney musical scene if they did, no doubt audiences would soon come to appreciate their merit and patronise them much better than they did on the occasion.

As even more outrageous ventures off the beaten track were made early in May, when the director of the Coa, Rex Hobbins, conducted two modern masterpieces — *Donizetti's The Green Island* by Harrison Birtwistle and *The Enchanted Island* by Viktor Ullmann — in three performances at the recording hall of the Opera House; unfortunately, this brief season coincided with my sojourn in Melbourne and I was not able to attend. ■



The last 1977 offering of Canberra Opera, on its home ground after pre-season at Orange and Wagga, was a superb production of Dostoevski's *Don Pasquale* that nearly founded, on the acting inadequacies of the principals.

Costs were kept to a minimum by a further example of the sort of resource-sharing involving regional companies that has become a welcome feature of the Australian opera scene in recent years. The modular sets, mounted on casters so they could be rolled into place for each following scene in full view of the audience, were borrowed from the Western Australian Opera Company and rapidly changed by costumes designed locally by Graham MacLean that blended perfectly to add up to a visually excellent evocation of the high-heeled mood of the piece. Ken Meades's production realigned this season start right from the beginning of the overture, during which he had the principals move out the shadows of the plot

*Don Pasquale*: Colin Slater and Franz Booby capturing and desirable in the first instance as the proves himself capable of being disenchanted when it suits her later in the piece. Colin Slater's Malatesta, too, did not make quite the full measure of good natured wit and wit in the part. Keith Hempton's Pasquale was a little too writhled and wry, too, only of nature but also of microphone, and Robert Donald's Elvira was a little too wistful on stage presence and vocal line to be as favorable as this reviewer is here ought to be. But James MacLean got an excellent musical result from singers and orchestra alike, overall, the evening was an enjoyable one, despite the reservations I have detailed above.

Brief mention must be made now, this month, of two other recent double bills — one coupling two of the lesser known Gilbert and Sullivan pieces, the other very short works by Bart and Hindemith.

The G and S double bill, at suburban

## GUIDE



ACT

## CANBERRA OPERA (07 02049)

*Aladdin and Genie!* (Hampdenbury) in English (Continuing on tour of A.C.T. primary schools involving child participation)

See also Canberra Theatre

## CANBERRA PLAYHOUSE (06 0480)

*Marcel Marceau* (18-21 July)

*Marceline Theatre of Australia* (See 02049) and directed by Richard Bradshaw and Azzurro directed by the company and directed by Richard Bradshaw (20-29 July)

## CANBERRA THEATRE (06 0211)

*Australian Ballet: Les Femmes* (July the 8th, Mondays to 6 Days To 2 July, 8.00, 77 (24 July)

*Berlioz: Damn Company* (11-16 July)  
*Canberra Opera, The Merry Widow* (Lhar) in English Conductor, David Colton, producer, Ross Cooke, set designer, Paul Rathem, costumes, costumes Australian Opera, With Lawrence Hume, Colin Skene, Gary Wilbrook, Dr Smith, Phil O'Brien

## THEATRE THREE (0422)

*Canberra Repertory Society*  
*How Deep Is Our Garden Green?* by Ben MacIntyre directed by Ross McGregor (To 16 July)  
*Tango Theatre: Once Upon A Mattress* Musical directed by Joyce MacFarlane (17 July-18 August)



NSW AND THE WALES

## ACTORS' COMPANY (061 2000)

*The Tugboat Romeo*, by William Shakespeare, adapted by Joseph Papp and Rosemary and Gabrielle Anne Reed, by Tim Sappard. Directed by Roddy Doherty designed by Chris Lanning. In both plays from the Siles, Herta De Arroy, Kate Ferguson, Michael Ruffa, Scott Lambert, Les Armstrong, Alan Furler (Playing in repertory to end of July)

## ARTS COUNCIL OF NEW SOUTH WALES (02 9611)

*The Bell in Bush Shave*, from Frank Struss Theatre Restaurant, William Street directed by George Currey, with Bert Moore, Lughina Wain, Penny Lee, John Barlow, Julie Gaskin

(Touring north coast and north west of NSW to 11 July)

*The Fort and the Paper Box*, from Deep Dark Theatre Movement, 50 Leveaux directed by Corbin Condon, with Max Hagle, Jackie Hunter, Nicholas Lusk, Christopher Parr (Touring south coast, Port Phillip and western districts to 31 July)

*The Solo Woodward And Puppet Workshop* (Continuing primary schools tour of NSW south coast and Riverina)

*With 2 or more children, solo singer and some other, 20 continuing primary schools tour in Sydney metropolitan area)*

*Madame Xue Theatre* directed and performed by Michael Franklin (High schools tour of metropolitan area, north coast and south west to 1 July)

*Dr David Webster Shaw*, directed and performed by Frank Colum and Jeffrey Manning (Primary schools tour of north west and north coast to 29 July)

*Smoking Mirror*, chamber music directed by Brian Spring (Primary schools and adult performance in central west to 1 July)

*New England* chamber music (the company Andrew Lott, Robert Harris, Joan Lunn (Primary schools and adult performance south coast, 4-12 July)

## AUSTRALIAN OPERA (02 0031)

*Spoley Opera House* (2-5/8)

*Opera Theatre: Les Contes de Hoffman* (Offenbach) in French 1, 9 July (even), 12, 21 July (even), 24, 30 July (mat) Conductor, William Rod, producer, Tito Caporale, designer, Anne Naruna, resident producer, Eliza Nield with Nancy Richardson, Jennifer Newingham, Heather Bagg, or Margara Elkins, Herta Wilson, Raymond Myers, Graham Lewis, Gordon Walcott, Graham Dobson

*The Barber of Seville* (Rossini) in Italian 2 July (mat) Conductor, Richard Stange producer, Julia Cox (rehearsal) by Michael Beauchamp, designer, Roger Ballin With Huguette Tourangeau, Mary Maynard, John Fright, Paul Fenn, Alan Light, Clifford Grant

*For Service* (Kahler) in English 2 July (even), 7 July, 18 July (even) Conductor, Richard Stange or Peter Robinson, producer, John Gough, designer, Michael Maitland (continues) with Henry Barden (even), resident producer, Eliza Nield with Robert Dark, Dennis Olson, Heather Bagg, Anne Anne Donald, Sherry or Grant Dobson, Robert Robinson, Graham Lewis, Paul Wilson-Barnes

*Leviathan Song* (Donizetti) in Italian 2 July (continues) 8 July (TV) Conductor, Richard Stange producer, George Ogilvie, designer, Michael Friedlander, resident producer, Michael Beauchamp With Joan Sutherland, Robert Harris, Margara Elkins, Kate Stevens or Paul Harris

*Orchestra* (Bart in French 8 July, 8 July (mat), 11, 18, 20 July, 21 July (even) Conductor, Richard Stange producer/designer, Tom Loughran, resident producer, Michael Beauchamp With Huguette Tourangeau, Deborah Cambridge, Donald Smith or Ron

Stewart, Raymond Myers or Peter van der Stoep

*Star Angles* (Pizzaro and Pizzaro) (Last available in Sydney, 14, 18, 22 July) Conductor, Richard Stange producer, Marlene Gelin, build, designer, Desmond Gough in Star Angles, Joan Sutherland, Rosina Randwick, Heather Bagg, Herta Wilson, Lughina Wain, Sydney Struss, Sylvia Johnson in Porters, Roger Stange, David Furler, Robert Allman, John Wright, George Fenn

## AUSTRALIAN THEATRE Newtown (02 0641)

*The City Mergers*, by Tennessee Williams An Opera Theatre Group production produced by Frank Hale, directed by Bill Ashken, designed by Paul Nelson With Barbara Marrot (Continuing)

## AUSTRALIAN THEATRE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE (02 99202)

*I Suppose I'll Have To* by Mattel Conn, directed by Raymond Grenville, *The Adversity*, by John Maitland, and *Dooley*, by Richard Tallich, both directed by John Wegg all designed by Yvonne Toss Plus *Where Your Own Success* directed by the company (Continuing on schools tour of north west NSW to 16 July)

## BALMAIN BEACH (02 7620)

*Reverend*, by Ray Lynam, directed by Peter Bagg (16-18 July)

## BONAPARTE THEATRE RESTAURANT (02 1515 or 02 7246)

Nothing until September

## BOCH PAVILION THEATRE (06 731) or 20 1173

Six Australian plays from the National Playwrights' Conference in repertory, with a mix of the original cast members in possible (To 16 July)

## CIVIC THEATRE Newcastle (21 077)

*Boeing Boeing*, by Marc Camoletti, adapted from the French by Berkeley Cross, directed by Doug Fisher, designed by Neil Dowd, starring Richard G. Sullivan with Doug Fisher, Shirley Cameron, Kate Stott, Judith Woodhouse (to 27 July)

## CONSERVATORIUM OF MUSIC (21 4308 or 21 9173)

*The Bartered Bride* (Smetana) in English 2 July (even) Director, Russell Jackson, musical director, Eric Chapman set designer, Michael O'Kane With Amanda Thorne, Jennifer Lusk, Paul, John Van or Geoffrey Harris, Geoffrey Crook, Jonathan Hughes, Colin Gell, Ben Audette, Colin, Clair Ford, Gary Horne, Sylvia Clarke, David Watson

## ENSEMBLE (02 0577)

*Raymond Gell*, by Boris and Samuel Spivakov, directed by Helen Gordon, designed by Doug Anderson (To 21 July)

## GENERAL (02 0611)

*A Man For All Seasons*, by Robert Bell, directed and designed by Catherine Clifford with Michael Boney, Elizabeth Sicks, Lauren Barker, Dennis Allen (Continuing)





**TWELFTH NIGHT (02 9585)**  
Mrs. Wiggins's Production by George Kennedy  
Shaw Director: John Whitley designer: Jan-  
nifer Carstairs (01 18 July)

## T

### TASMANIA

#### TASMANIAN PUPPET THEATRE (01 7994)

Chrs. CHIRL, Bruce Mervin (2-5 July)  
Puppet Theatre, Launceston (Western 11 9  
July)

#### THEATRE ROYAL (04 6064)

Parasol's Parasol's Mosaic Street Produc-  
tion: Gillian and Sullivan series, directed by  
Tali Craig (10-13 July)  
Tasmanian Ballet (19-23 July)  
Tasmanian Opera Company: Cool Fair Yarn  
Directed by Michael Lanchbury (From 18  
July)



### SOUTHWESTERN AUSTRALIA

#### ARTS THEATRE (07 5175)

Workshop production to 2 July

#### FESTIVAL CENTRE (01 2905)

Festival Theatre: Australian Ballet: Merv  
Wulfe, with Dame Margot Forsyth, Marilyn  
Jones, Marilyn Rhee, Gailene Scott, Alan  
Miller, Walter Mueller, Kelvin Cox, Jonathan  
Raffin, Gary Newman (19-21 July)  
Spent ACT 3 Spent Food, musical by Tony  
Gardner Director: Malcolm Haylock (30 June-  
2 July)  
For Playhouse see SATC

#### THE JAM FACTORY

The Zed's First Public Director, Andy Gee  
Flinders University Drama Centre (29 June-  
2 July)

#### LITTLE THEATRE

1 Show 1 Show: Mike to Feet Show by John  
Kennard Director, Andrew Sharp (A1) (28  
Continuing to 4 July)  
Globe: Killing Game by Eugene Ionesco Direc-  
tor: Steve Brown (01 16 and 30-31 July)

#### Q THEATRE (02 9451)

The Golden Years by Bill Moxon and Betty  
Gore Director, Bill Moxon (30-31 July)

#### STATE OPERA (02 5118 or 152 1044)

The Phaedra: Adelaide Festival Centre (01 2585)  
The Cossacks of Pigeon (Mozzart) in  
English Continuity: Miel Friedman, director,  
Adrian Slack, designer, John Carverella With  
Edna Hume, Gregory Drumper, Angela  
Dewing, Thomas Edwards, Daphne Harris,  
Peter Humphrey, Judith Thompson, Norma  
Knight, Kevin Mullen, John Wood, David Woot-  
ton (18, 20, 22-23, 25, 27, 29, 30 July)

#### SOUTH AUSTRALIAN THEATRE COMPANY (01 5150)

Playhouse: Two Ends by Ray by Michael Carr

and Rian Blair Director, Colin George  
designer, Rodney Ford (To 16 July) New  
season opens 12 August with *After Six* Four  
End

#### SOUTH AUSTRALIAN DANCE COMPANY Country tour (20 July-12 August)

#### UNION HALL

Power and Jubel by William Shakespeare  
Director: Jim Wile University of Adelaide  
Theatre Guild Ensemble (14-18 July, 13-18 July)



### VICTORIA

#### ALEXANDER THEATRE (06 3028)

The Clowns: devised directed by Peter Oyston  
for the Alexander Theatre Company (To 23  
July)  
The Crucible directed by Peter Oyston for the  
Alexander Theatre Company (From 23 July)

#### AUSTRALIAN PERFORMING GROUP (041 1154)

From Factory: First Theatre: The Clowns  
Show by John Russell directed by Carol  
Fisher  
From Factory: Back Theatre: The Mass Group  
(To 31 July)

#### COMEDY THEATRE (060 3210)

Doctor in Love by Richard Gordon. Produced  
by Gery Van Eyckend and Paul Doran. With  
Robert Ireland and Geoffrey Gurney (To 10  
July)

#### MRS MAURIST'S THEATRE (041 5211)

The Twinner And All That Jazz: A musical  
collaboration with John Deschamps, Caroline  
Gilbert and John O May Musical director,  
Michael Spack photographer, Wilton  
Pittard design, Trina Parker Produced by  
P.C. Williamson Productions Ltd and Michael  
Edgley International Pty Ltd (Continuing)

#### LA MAMA (07 6001)

Teach Anatomy: Festival (Dance not  
available)

#### EAST LAUGH (041 6281)

Radio Theatre: a Circus or My Soap, directed  
by Tim Robinson

#### MILBOURNE THEATRE COMPANY (045 1100)

Antony and Cleopatra by William Shakespeare  
adapted by Ray Lawler Directed by John  
Somers, script designed by Richard Frank,  
costumes designed by Marie Maxwell (To 23  
July)

The Merchant of Venice Directed by John  
Somers (From 24 July)

Samuel Beckett: The Chair by David Williamson  
Directed by Rodney Fries, designed by Brian  
Gordon (To 23 July)

Theatre in Education: *Let It or Leave It*  
by Jonathan Hardy The Refresher by  
John Parnell Director, Tony Chubb. Men From  
by John Wood Directed and designed by  
Robert Laws  
Company A and B: Metropolitan series

#### PLAYBOX THEATRE (01 4832)

Garden Chapel in The Absence of Benjamin  
Franklin by Steve J Spence Musical Theatre

production presented by Paradise Productions  
(From 1 July)

#### PRINCE OF THE STREE (040 2011)

Victorian State Opera: J. Doyle (Mozzart)  
Conductor: Richard David, director, Robin  
Lansing, designer: Marie Maxwell With Ann  
Cannon, Helma Neukam, Barry Brown, Janet  
Dewson, Jean Thomas, Ariel Sakmarak, John  
Morton, Hartley Pennington Jack Lane  
Orchestra: Victorian Museum of Melbourne  
(1, 3, 4 July)

Maui's Maroon Presented by Michael Edgley  
International Pty Ltd in association with  
Derek Glynn (From 25 July)

#### NE KIDNA PANDA (04 0011)

Nature and the London Festival Ballet in  
Power and Jubel Presented by Michael  
Edgley International Pty Ltd (23-30 July)

#### TOTAL THEATRE (041 4991)

Let Me People Love: A musical celebration of  
sex by Karl Wilson first Directed by Peter  
Baker presented by Eric Davis (To July 23)

#### VICTORIAN STATE OPERA (01 5001)

Power and Flowers and Thugs on The River  
Love of Prospero Project, by Peter Narrows,  
Continuing on schools tour metropolitan  
area (See also Princess Theatre)



### WESTERN AUSTRALIA

#### URIC THEATRE RESTAURANT (01 5995)

The First Part Year Show with Joan Sydney  
THE HOLE IN THE WALL (01 3044)  
Peter Finner by Louis Nucera Director, John  
Milton (29 June-2 July)  
Mardi Gras by Alan Blair Director, Anne  
Nucera (17 July-August 20)

#### PLAYHOUSE (01 5400)

Democracy: Focus by Christopher Hampton  
Director, Anne Nucera (30 June-2 July)  
M.M.S. People, by Gilbert and Sullivan  
A.S.P. by Gilbert and Sullivan Directed  
by Gilbert and Sullivan Society Director, John  
Milton (28 July-August)  
Greenroom: Gang Master by Alan de Green  
Director, Andrew Ross (1 July-23 July)

#### TIE

Wulfe by Brian Ford Director, Andrew  
Ross Spent Time available for booking  
On Time (journey) Double Edge by Linda Stan-  
ton and Peter Wulfe Director, Andrew Ross  
Cap'n's Franchise Simon Hopkinson

#### RINGAL (01 1517)

My Fair Fanny by Charles Lawrence Presented  
by Australian Stage Productions, with Tim  
Buckley-Lipson and Judy Mann (30 June-23  
July)

#### WEST AUSTRALIAN GALLERY (01 4441)

Onstage Theatre: A Season of success in-  
cluding Sea Pans and Love Match by Leigh  
Wulfe (30-31 July)

#### WEST AUSTRALIAN OPERA (01 5400 or 70 4103)

In 1995

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**Credits**

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